To mark 350th birth anniversary

Guru Gobind Singh

THE LAST PHASE

Rare Bihar documents shed new light on Guru's demise



HARBANS SINGH VIRDI

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To Kulpreet Singh Virdi and Ranjeetha Virdi, my son and daughter-in-law, with love and affection

Contents

Should the Guru appear among us today and ask for a head, millions would prostrate before him to kiss the edge of his sacred sword.

– A Thought

Preface

Sikhs like Scots have been considered the finest soldiers in the world. It is a studied verdict of British generals under whose commands the Sikhs fought on various fronts in World War I and II and many other campaigns in British India. Their acts of heroism and valour have attracted the world attention. The British period saw Sikhs recuited in large numbers in the Army. This was only natural since the English have had the firsthand experience of the toughness, endurance and their fighting spirit during the Anglo-Sikh wars in 1849. Their loyalty stood unquestioned.

The Sikhs had long been remarkable for their bravery, said Baron Charles Hugel, a German scientist, to Maharaja Ranjit Singh after he travelled to the Panjab in 1836. Of them he said, "They are naturally a strong race of men, and by the hardy manner of living are capable of enduring much fatigue. They are expert in the use of arms and are excellent marksmen. It is said that the Sikhs have a sort of superstitious respect for the sword." Hugel's cup of appreciation was full

to the brim, as he watched Sikh troops in awe and admiration. "By the sword they lived, by the sword they attained freedom,'' the German traveller had told the Sikh monarch.

The saga of Saragarhi, which saw scenes of valour and bravery, best examplifies the Sikh spirit. To substantiate our point we draw the discription from *Saragarhi: The Forgotten Battle,* which gives blow-by-blow account of the bloody action that took place on September 12,1897 in the unruly North-West Frontier with Afghanistan. Sikhs defended British India during a period known as "Great Game."

Pathans had declared jihad on the British and gathered at Samana, baying for British blood. The 21 soldiers of the 36th Sikh Regiment were stationed at the vital communications post of Saragarhi. The small Sikh batch was surrounded by 10,000 primitive Afghan Pakhtuns. Not only were they vastly outnumbered; each Sikh soldier had barely 40 rounds of ammunition. Finding them surrounded from all sides, Pathan leader Gul Badshah asked them to lay down arms but the Sikh spurned the offer with disdain. Undeterred abd unruffled, Sikhs took up positions and defended the post with all their might. But Pathans managed to dig walls of Saragarhi unnoticed. With walls breached, the enemy rushed forward and hand-to-hand fighting erupted. In one such encounter a Sikh sepoy killed 20 Pathans. Undaunted,

Sikhs fought to the last man to defend the communication post. But they fell one by one in the bloodstained field. While action raged at Saragarhi, fellow Sikhs showed fighting legacy at Lockhart and Gulistan Forts.

All 21 Sikhs gained a legendary status through a tale of glorious deeds and sacrifice. When the British enforcements arrived next day, they found 700-800 bodies of tribesmen. The action was one of the greatest last stands in the history of wars. British army officers witnessed the battle and notes were passed on by wire from frontier post to the barracks and were officially recorded.

Queen Victoria was telegrammed about the brave last stand at Balmoral.

A report was prepared on the aftermath where they found more than 600 bodies of Afghan invaders. In the outpost lay bodies of 21 Sikh soldiers. They were the battle-hardened heirs of the great Guru. It appeared that the end fight was fought with bayonets and hand-to-hand combat.

The Battle of Saragarhi is counted as second topmost tactical last stand. It is taught in various military academies to date.

Bravery of Sikhs was recognized with memorials at Amritsar, Ferozepore and on the Samana. Saragarhi was given a battle honour with September 12 set as Saragarhi Day.

The brave 21 Sikhs lived up to Guru's words that a Sikh could take on a throusand. Tributes poured in from far and wide.

"...the name of your race has become almost synonymous in the English language with traditions of desperate courage and unflinching loyalty," Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, said in Lahore; reported by The Times, dated April 7, 1899.

" ... the conduct displayed by the 21 men of the 36th Sikh Regiment whose names were inscribed on the memorial was characteristic of the (Sikh) nation's traditions. It should be kept as an example to others, in order to show how bravemen should behave when facing fearful odds," – General Sir Arthur Power Palmer, quoted in The Times, April 17, 1902.

All intrepid heroes of Saragarhi were posthumously decorated with the highest awards in those days - the Indian Order of Merit.

Military exploits of Sikhs in World War I and II, in which 83,003 died and 1,35000 wounded, failed to escape the notice of Sir Winston Churchill, who made a speech in Parliament about the bravery of Sikhs. "British people are indebted and obliged," said Churchill, "to Sikhs for a long time. I know within this century we needed their help twice and they did help us very well. As a result, we are today able to live with honour, dignity and independence. In the war they fought and died for us wearing turbans." Thus

acknowledging the importance of Sikh turban and identity of a Sikh.

Before Saragarhi, Sikhs had shown exemplary courage in the Chitral campaign in 1894. Lauding the gallantry of the Sikh troops in action; British General Sir Ian Hamilton pays rich tributes to them in the following words:

"In the highest sense of the word, extreme gallantry has been shown by this regiment. In spite of tremendous losses, there was no sign of wavering all day. Not an inch of ground gained was given up and not a single strangler came back. The ends of the enemy's trenches were found to be blocked with the bodies of Sikhs, who died fighting at close quarters. .... The history of the Sikhs affords many instances of their value as soldiers but it may be safely asserted that nothing finer than the grim valour and steady discipline displayed by them on June 4, 1894, has ever been done by soldiers of the Khalsa. Their devotion to duty and their splendid loyalty to their orders and to their leaders made a record that their nation should look back upon with pride for many generations."

Even in the times of Guru Gobind Singh and later Banda Singh Bahadur, Mughal soldiers in particular and people in general attributed miracles and other supernatural acts to the names of the Guru. So wide was the belief prevalent that when Daya Singh handed over the Zafarnama to Aurangzeb in person,

the Emperor, out of curiosity, asked the bearer of the Epistle if the Guru could perform any miracles? The ruling Mughal coterie could hardly believe how the weak and the meek populace suppressed for centuries could humble the mighty and the powerful. However, little did they know that none from the House of Nanak - from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh - ever believed in miracles? Having said this, the phenomenon the Muslim rulers failed to perceive was the practical miracle performed by the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, by galvanizing dregs of society and the down trodden into a race of warriors. Even for Guru Gobind Singh this miracle would not have been performed had he not sacrificed his father and mother and also his four dear sons to set a personal and practical example before the Khalsa whom he nurtured with the blood of his family and followers. This act of total effacement for the cause of the nation will continue to rouse the Khalsa to perform great acts of sacrifice and heroism for as long as the world survives. After all, Guru Gobind Singh had infused into the Khalsa the invincible spirit and blessed it with a sovereign mind. But it must also be mentioned here that the idea of miracles gained currency because of the stunning successes of the Sikhs who fought in the battlefield against overwhelming numbers with total disregard of their lives. Though what the Guru did in his military

career cannot be considered less than a miracle. His making good his escape from the Chamkaur garhi when the enemy was swarming round the small citadel like ants and locusts, his near capture at the hands of a Mughal detachment near Lall in Patiala district when he was being carried as Uch ka Pir by two Pathan brothers Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan and his escape from the last encounter at Khidrana from the very clutches of the imperial army are certainly no less than a miracle.

Greatness of the Guru lay in the fact that he held no distinction between his Sikhs and his sons; and to sons goes the credit of upholding those principles of courage and conviction in the bloodstained field of danger, death and destruction, such principles which were so dear to the Guru who followed them throughout his life by setting a personal example before his Khalsa.

But history does not seem to have done much justice to Guru Gobind Singh for; more have accorded him a royal status than the honour of a revolutionary. He ignited the Khalsa with Prometheus fire, which transformed a timid into a terror in the battlefield. The metamorphosis was brought along by Guru Gobind Singh who roused a rebellion against the forces of darkness and engines of injustice and oppression.

When Emperor Aurangzeb died, the Guru gave all aid and comfort to his son Muazzam,

when the latter sought his help to ascend the Mughal throne. The Guru did not allow the bitter past to bedevil his mind. He extended the help to the son of a monarch who had killed his father and four sons.

These are verily the highest reaches of human magnanimity.

On the other side, it was his philosophy of war to ignore the strength of the enemy once he had entered the battlefield in the name of truth and justice. Throughout, he remained firm in his resolve in the face of forces of darkness, deceit and treachery.

Even as he lay all by himself, away from his kith and kin in the jungles of Machhiwara under a cruel winter sky, he never lost faith in the Will of God. Even at that hour of gloom he burst into a glorious song of hope and affirmation, which has since become the signature tune of the Sikhs.

Guru Gobind Singh was only the spirit of Guru Nanak Dev journeying through nine Houses to be finally diffused into the commonality of the Khalsa, whom he ordered to wear hair as the lion his mane. In plenitude of youth, his face shone like a diamond. Even in his declining years with grey hair adoring his flowing beard now, there was a degree of sovereignty about his person, which attracted notice and adoration.

The life of Guru Gobind Singh studded with sacrifices, which finds no parallel in the history of the world, has always fascinated me

no end. It was roughly 18 years ago that I did a book dealing with battles the Guru fought in his entire whirlwind military career on the occasion when the Sikhs were celebrating the 300th anniversary of the creation of the Khalsa. Once again, in 2008 when the Sikhs were rejoicing at '300 years in Guru's company', I found it a suitable occasion to start another work - this time on the last crucial days of Guru Gobind Singh when the Khalsa the world over was celebrating the 300th anniversary of the investiture of spiritual authority on Guru Granth Sahib. Towards this end, before initiating my research I visited as many historical places as was possible, connected with my subject and lay my hands on all rich and ancient resource material, in Persian and Urdu besides English and Punjabi. I have found through my long literary journey that intellectual giants like Puran Singh had done a great job, bringing out the real meaning and motive of Guru's mission. I have even quoted the comments of all - Koer Singh of Gursobha, Bhai Sukha Singh or Kavi Santokh Singh, to just mention a few, to stress upon my point - even when their views on important historical facts were in variance with one another - for readers to make their own honest assessment of the available material when the Guru became such subject of intense study for various scholars in that century and thereafter. I

would like to quote Puran Singh below to substantiate my point:

"In the name of God did he fashion Anandpur and the New Order
The Khalsa is verily the Face of the Lord."

I would feel rewarded even if a few readers feel that I have broken a new ground in research on Guru's life. I would thank those scholars who have done pioneering work in the related field. But completion of the work has given me immense satisfaction. In my humble endeavour, I would like to thank those who helped me in the labyrinths of my literary journey with their highly valuable suggestions and sound advice. I am especially grateful to Dr Anoop Singh for having put at my disposal an invaluable document relating to the last days of the Guru, which his father, Dr Tarlochan Singh, found in a far-off gurdwara in Bihar

I would attribute any blemish in the book to my lack of intellectual depth for which the reader may forgive me as a humble servant of the great Guru. For readers who find it worth the effort, I bow my head in gratitude.

Wah Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wah Guru Ji Ki Fateh.

Harbans Singh Virdi
Mohali
2017

Introduction

Today the world has become a single, undivided community of peoples. Means of transport and communication have, no doubt, literally shrunk the world. However, despite the progress of science, frozen frontiers and obliterated barriers and boundaries, cleavage between minds of men is widening with each passing day, causing strife. The sickness and the suffering of other people hardly move others, others' suffering is hardly others' concern, so engrossed are people in the confines and comforts of their homes that they hardly care to bother for those who are poor and unprivileged, condemned to the life of mere existence. It appears as if the care and conscience of man has gone to the seed.

When the whole world is castled in the confrontations of all kinds today, it is the luminous image of the great guru, Guru Gobind Singh, which restores to us a kind of hope for future. It helps us to paint a picture of promised millennium incorporating the very ideals for which he waged a relentless struggle to uphold truth, against forces of tyranny, oppression and injustice, perpetuated by the Mughal lust for power and domination.

Perhaps survival and struggle have remained wedded to each other since centuries, just in the manner of warp and woof - just as death is but a shadow of the eternal and the timeless.

Jesus Christ was born to raise and reform Jews, but it was Jews who, in the end, sought him to be crucified, similarly Prophet Mohammed was born among Qureshis whom he wanted to raise and reform, however, had he not run to Medina, the Quresh would have done with him. Still further, Guru Nanak Dev was a Khatri by caste, but few Khatris followed him, what to say of others, even his own two sons, Lakhmi Das and Siri Chand did not join his standard. Like charity, hostility for great men and prophets, always began at home.

Struggle for survival began for them, sometimes in the tender years of their lives. Guru Gobind Singh was only nine when the severed head of the ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, was brought before him at Anandpur Sahib. More than anything else, the Guru was forced by circumstances to launch a course and crusade against the tyrannical forces of the time who wanted to finish the 'bearded ruffians' as the Turks called them then, root and branch. But even amidst the time of turmoil and turbulence, when steel struck steel, Guru Gobind Singh, like his preceptor Guru Nanak Dev, emphasized the dignity of labour and a life of

self-respect. But before that survival was essential to the new creed which he had given rise to at Anandpur Sahib. So, it was a natural consequence that he acknowledged the role of sword in the Khalsa struggle.

It has been a general practice among warriors, generals, kings and princes to create a feeling of awe in the minds of the people in order to build an image larger than life. But for Guru Gobind Singh, world's riches mattered little. He led a life of ideal existence. He devoted his whole life to the promotion of religion and right and just living, without any distinction of caste and creed, high and low.

However, when after the sacrifice of his father and ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, people started gathering under his standard, it invited the wrath and envy of the hill Hindu rajas. Under his touch and tenets of his new order, common and simple people, who would not have dreamt of what an armed struggle might mean, rose to his call and humbled that professional soldiery which was trained in the art of warfare for centuries. When the enemy rank fell and flew, the victorious under his command did not chase the wounded with a view to destroying them. Nor did he occupy any territory on which he won the war, which he could, as a matter of right. On the other, he offered prayers to the Almighty for showing to him mercy and benevolence.

For about two decades under his command, battles were fought, enemy was defeated, more often than not, pride was dented, troops were routed, enemy ran and returned, yet the Khalsa continued with the relentless rebellion and forced the Mughal marauders to flee from the battlefield. But even amidst the drawing of swords, flashing of arrows and one-to-one fights among his followers and soldiers of the army, he never lost sight of the ideals for which he had raised the sword. In fact, in an hour of victory, he showed a rare sense of magnanimity to the enemy.

After ascending the Guruship, the first thing Guru Gobind Singh thought was ponder over problems facing the community and the country. The people had been leading a life of subjugation and servility for centuries. For being the victim of oppression and tyranny for too long, they had lost all hopes of putting up any resistance. In addition to this no one rose from the rubble to give them hope and the lead. At such a time the Guru fell back to the ideology of his grandfather, sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind. He gave a call to adherents of his faith to take to arms to resist oppression and injustice of the time. This soon was to arouse the suspicion of the hill Hindu rajas who lost no time in entrusting upon themselves the task of crushing the movement before it took a concrete shape. It was a stage of infancy of the Khalsa, the Guru knew resources and troops were limited at his command, he

wanted to avoid war as far as it was possible, without sacrificing his ideals. So even though he shifted to Nahan from Anandpur Sahib on the invitation of Raja Medni Parkash, yet war with Hill rajas was unavoidable. The first clash of arms took place at Bhangani, about 8 miles to the north on the banks of the Yamuna. It was baptism by fire for Guru Gobind Singh who fought one of the fiercest battles of his military career, a battle which can be classified as eventful in many respects - desertion by 500 Pathans enlisted in the Guru's army on behalf of Pir Budhu Shah, whose real name was Pir Budr-Ud-Din; only one Kale Khan resisted the desertion of his comrades-in-arms and stood by the side of Guru Gobind Singh; running away of Udasis from the Guru's camp where they were feasting at his expense, at the mere mention of the word battle, but heroic deed of one Udasi sadhu, Kirpal, who fought as a faqir amidst the highly trained generals and skilled troops, yet by the grace of the Guru, he smote one famous general Hayat Khan who paid the price for taunting the sadhu, saying that the battleground was no playfield for faqirs and even refused to attack the latter, but forgetting in the process that this particular faqir was no ordinary mortal but one sent by Guru Gobind Singh who made sparrows hunt the hawks and then finally the crowning glory attained by Pir Budr-ud-Din who lost his brother Syed Bhure Shah and sons Ashraf and Muhammad Shah.

Heroic deeds performed by Guru Gobind Singh's maternal uncle, Kirpal and his cousins were exemplary.

But the battle was won against hordes of the hill rajas, who had planned to make short work of Guru's rabble-rousers, at the most, unskilled and untrained soldiery if it could be called so.

With this decisive battle, the Guru laid bare the roadmap for future plans before the rulers, be it Mohammedans or the crafty hill chiefs.

After the victory, the Guru marched back to Anandpur where he gave concrete shape to his mission by establishing the Khalsa on Thursday, March 30, 1699. The summoning of the great congress of the Sikhs in 1699 where the Guru formally initiated the Order of the Khalsa amidst symbolic sacrifices and ceremonies was an event that was destined to have far-reaching consequences. With this act, a purely religious body was now entrusted with political duties as well and was invested with an insignia and authority. It was on this congregation that a martial edge was given to the creed and the doctrine of sword was proclaimed in tones of thunder and prophecy. It must also be understood at this stage that the Guru was not advocating militarism or creating a cult of violence. He could not allow the engines of oppression, injustice and tyranny to run forever. He could not lie unmoved and let the storm of persecution and prosecution blow overhead.

The Guru had the mandate from Heaven to shake the empire of loot, larceny and lies. Thus he sang the song of saber and identified the sword with the lord and victory. By establishing the martial creed, he moved away from the traditional Hindu idea of passivity and inaction.

This great event occurred on the occasion of Baisakhi at Keshgarh Sahib on March 30, 1699. Only a month ago, Guru's last and fourth son, Fateh Singh was born to Mata Jito (Jit Kaur) on February 22. The Tenth Master had fixed a day by summoning all his Sikhs, sending hukamnamas to every part of the country. The disciples responded in great number. When they had all gathered, the Guru rose and unsheathed his sword and called for a life to be offered to his steel from among the number. The call naturally created terror in the assembly; it was the first time that such a call came from the Guru. Now deathly silence prevailed in the assembly, none stirred. The Guru called again: "Does any disciple want to die under my steel?" A few moments later, Daya Ram of Lahore rose with folded hands, with his head bent in deep reverence, and said: "Thine it is for ever, O Master; under the keen edge of thy steel is the highest bliss." A tent was pitched on a little mound nearby; the disciple followed the Master into the tent. Out comes the Master again with his sword, now blood dripping from his weapon. The Guru called again and

hencefore Sikhs would have suffix Singh or Kaur with their names.

Thousands of Sikhs were anointed on that day.

By partaking Amrit prepared from the same bowl, the distinction of high and low was obliterated among them and they belonged to the newfound order, the Khalsa. Now the sparrow could look the hawk in the eye.

By establishing the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh completed the noble task initiated by founder of the faith, Guru Nanak Dev, in the 15th century. The first Guru, even though he was born in a high caste - Khatri- was very critical of the prevailing divisions in society at that time. By removing caste and colour prejudices he set a personal example by keeping in his company, a mirasi, Mardana all through his Udasis (missionary travels). As Bhai Gurdas rightly commented: Through the efforts of Guru Nanak the four castes were transformed into one.

So, the creation of the Khalsa free from inherent weaknesses on the basis of caste, colour and creed was the culmination of the process given shape to by Guru Nanak three centuries earlier. The foundations of the Sikh brotherhood were, indeed, laid by Guru Nanak Dev, the first Prophet of the Sikhs.

But one must remember here that nothing great is ever born without pain and travail. It is immutable law of nature. There is pain even when a child is born. No wonder then

that the Khalsa was born amidst an ecstasy of pain. Few peoples in the world have known such sovereignty of sufferings. The Guru taught his followers to wear pain as the garment of the Lord.

Final Escape

The battle of Chamkaur fought on December 22, 1704, is unique in the history of the world in the sense that seldom had so few been pitted against so huge an army. Chamkaur had a garhi, a small fortress that the Guru occupied. Guru Gobind Singh himself in addition to his two elder sons, Prince Ajit Singh and Prince Jujhar Singh, had only a dedicated body of 40 soldiers. Whereas, according to Zafarnama, the imperial army consisted of lakhs. Soon the enemy, which was on trail, besieged the fortress where the Guru and his Sikhs had taken shelter. Now there was no other way except to fight the enemy in the open and die one by one.

The Sikhs held the enemy at bay for a long time, thus baffling the calculation of the imperial forces as the Master kept up an incessant shower of his gold-tipped arrows.

But before describing what happened in and around Chamkaur, we will deal with all circumstances that led to the Chamkaur siege.

The confrontation at Bhangani (October 3, 1688) had set the stage for future and more frequent bloody engagements. The moment of second serious confrontation soon arrived

as the Hindu hill rajas, smarting from defeat at Bhangani, now joined forces with the imperial army to stem the tiger, which the Guru had unleashed on them. The pack of hill rajas, princelings and Mughal satraps had grown green with jealousy as the Guru's rising power and popularity had them baying for Guru's blood. All types of cohorts, marauders and desperadoes were enlisted to check further advance of the Sikh movement, but little did they realize that there was no stopping the revolutionary spirit, which was pervading in the whole of Punjab. The skirmishes and forays around Anandpur, the seat of the Guru, had developed into desperate and long engagements.

Aurangzeb who was a bigot and a fanatical monarch did not fail to see the rising power of the Guru and his Sikhs. Even otherwise, the battles of Bhangani and Nadaun (February-March, 1690) where the enemy lay petrified, mauled and beaten despite its superiority in numbers and arms served notice on the Mughal rulers that the youthful and valiant leader of the Sikh Nation meant business. This made the Mughal emperor sit up and take notice. Initially, the emperor tried to check Guru's revolutionary movement with a massed might of princes and potentates but failed miserably. The emperor failed to realize that the Guru through the initiation of the New Order had solemnized the marriage of spirit and sword. Thus there was nothing in

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the Mughal textbook to counter such a military challenge.

Therefore, with Mughal pride dented and Hindu caste superiority obliterated, the common enemy now waited for an opportunity to avenge the reverses at Bhangani and Nadaun. The opportunity presented itself in the siege of Anandpur not long after.

When the Guru with his entourage evacuated Anandgarh Fort on December 21, 1704, the Mughal army and its lackeys hill rajas, forgetting their vows on the Quran and cow, immediately followed, in trail, skirmishes erupted as early as Nirmohgarh; Sarsa stream was crossed in chaos and confusion. It is during this turmoil and disorder that the Guru's family split, those who crossed the Sarsa stream were Guru, his two elder sons and 41 other Sikhs. Undeterred however, the Guru continued his march to safety.

But before he reached a safe sanctuary, he displayed skill and strategy of a great commander with limited resources at his command. When he first learnt that the sheer number of the army might overpower Prince Ajit Singh and his companions, he immediately sent Ude Singh, son of legendary Bhai Mani Singh, to pull Ajit Singh out of imperial mass of soldiers. The great warrior as he was no doubt, yet against superior number of the Mughal army, Ude Singh fell,

fighting in the battlefield, but not before sending Ajit Singh and his men to safety.

Guru Gobind Singh and his family - mother, his wives and four sons - was just in the process of crossing the Sarsa stream when he heard that a contingent of the imperial army was in hot pursuit and was drawing too close for comfort. Without waiting any further, he immediately sent that illustrious *guru ka beta* Bhai Jeewan Singh, who had brought the severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadur to Anandpur Sahib, to check the advance of the pursuing army. On his master's command, Jeewan did as he was bid. Fighting against heavy odds, he managed to carve a safe passage to ensure that his Guru, his family and other fleeing Sikhs remained unmolested by the Mughal army but in the bargain paid the price with his life, which he had placed at the Guru's feat.

However, the danger to the Guru and his Khalsa army did not diminish even after crossing the Sarsa stream, which was in spate. Marching hurriedly towards Ropar, the Guru again learnt that a detachment of the marauding enemy forces were close to conflict between two sides, he immediately dispatched Bhai Bachittar Singh, another great warrior and the conqueror of conflict with an elephant at Anandpur Sahib during siege, marched back to save his Sikhs and provide his Guru an unhindered path. Bachittar Singh and his band of soldiers

fought a pitched battle, holding back the enemy at bay, but most of his companions bit the dust and he himself was fatally wounded. But in the process, he provided a cover and let the Guru and his entourage reach a safe haven - the residence of Pathan Nihang Khan at Ropar. His surviving comrades carried severely wounded Bachittar Singh back to the presence of the Guru at Nihang Khan's abode but the latter did not want to stay longer than required under any circumstances. So leaving injured Bachittar Singh behind under the care and concern of the Pathan's family, Guru Gobind Singh and his men continued their onward march towards Chamkaur.

As was expected, the Mughal authorities of the area got wind of the Guru's brief halt at the Pathan's house and raided the place. Though the raiding party was allowed to search every corner of the house, yet the Pathan, true to his spirit and loyalty to the Guru and the Khalsa, did not let the raiding party enter the room where Bachittar Singh lay tended by his unmarried daughter Mumtaz. That was, however, God's will that the Bachittar Singh's soul took flight next day of this incident.

What happened next and how it happened at the garhi of Chamkaur has no one described better than the British scholar Max Arthur Macauliffe, who almost records the near eyewitness account of the heroic deeds of not only of Guru Gobind Singh, his two

sons, Prince Ajit Singh and Prince Jujhar Singh but also of the core group of the Khalsa that included four of his Five Beloved. The fierce battle took heavy toll of the Guru's camp. But before we culminate the chapter with the final assault, we will narrate how Sikhs drank the nectar of martyrdom and how bravely the two young princes showed exemplary courage in the face of certain death. In the midst of barbaric fight where steel struck steel, and the battlefield became a cemetery of sorts, the two princes also prepared themselves for the next life.

But even at this stage the Guru lost neither courage nor fortitude.

Having taken refuge on the outskirts of Chamkaur, the Guru decided to take on the allied forces with just a handful of Sikhs under his command but ready to lay down their lives at his bidding.

Macauliffe presents a perfect picture and records the nearly eyewitness account of the battle fought, in the following fashion:

There were in total 41 Sikhs only, including Guru Gobind Singh himself besides his two sons - Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh - at the extemporized fort. Before launching his defensive campaign against the allied forces, Guru Gobind Singh addressed his men:

"You would not listen to my advice to remain in Anandpur (Sahib). When you took your departure, you did not calculate that this

time of peril would ever arrive. You trusted to the oath of Mohammedans on the Quran and of the hill men on their gods and cows, and this is the result. There is no opportunity now of employing traditional means of dealing with enemies. We can only defend ourselves. There are hundreds and thousands against us. Die not the death of jackals, but bravely as you have hitherto done, and avenge the deceit practiced by those great sinners. The more you strive, the greater will be the reward. If you fall fighting, you will meet me as martyrs in heaven. If you conquer, you shall obtain sovereignty, and in either case your lot shall be envied by mortals."

After addressing the Sikhs whose blood was already curdling to attain the honour ahead, the Guru appointed eight men to guard each wall of the garhi. That left just nine Sikhs with him now. Further, he directed Kotha Singh and Madan Singh to hold the door. Now there were seven left. He himself, his two sons, Daya Singh and Sant Singh occupied the top storey. Alim Singh and Man Singh were appointed sentinels.

With commands distributed thus, the Guru now sent the first detachment of five Sikhs in the fierce battle that lay ahead, with Zabardust Khan, viceroy of Lahore and Wazir Khan, viceroy of Sirhind along with their toady hill rajas in the enemy ranks. The first five Sikhs fought bravely and wrought havoc in the enemy ranks but were killed after causing

much slaughter. Next went Khazan Singh, Dan Singh and Dhyan Singh and met the fate of earlier Sikhs after slaying those who dared contend with them. From a batch of five to three, and with Guru's camp further depleted, now Mohkam Singh, one of the Beloved Five, entered the fight and followed the example of his earlier companions. While Guru Gobind Singh was lauding valour displayed by Mohkam Singh came forward another of the Five Beloved Himmat Singh, seeking permission to enter the fray and redeem himself in the battlefield. After Himmat Singh fell fighting and reducing the enemy strength, the Guru again sent a batch of five Sikhs to repel the attack of Mohammedans. As was natural they too crowned themselves with glory. Next Ishar Singh and Deva Singh pierced the enemy line for whatever they were worth, such was the destruction they wrought in the battlefield that the Mohammedan soldiers thought they possessed some supernatural powers.

At this point of time Daya Singh who was the first among the Five Beloved counselled Guru Gobind Singh to escape, saying if the Guru survived, the seed of religion would survive. Next a group of six warriors-Muhar Singh, Kirat Singh, Anand Singh, Lal Singh, Kesar Singh and Amolak Singh - got ready to serve the enemy the taste of the Khalsa sword. When all six were killed, Nahar Khan, a recently arrived officer of the imperial forces,

tried to scale the garhi, but was immediately shot down by the Guru. Still, Ghairat Khan, another officer, then showed the courage to advance but met similar fate at the hands of the Guru. Such was the precision and firepower the Guru displayed that none, thereafter, dared climb the fortress wall.

However, the Mohammedan army made a plan to rush in numbers and seize the Guru. But the Guru would not let them and shot them down. They failed miserably in their attempt as the Sikh prophet held at bay the multitudinous host.

At this stage Guru's eldest son, Prince Ajit Singh, sought permission to take on the enemy under such desperate circumstances. According to an account, it was yet not decided by Guru Gobind Singh to send his elder son to the battle, but it was Ajit Singh himself who sought permission to fight. Ajit Singh asked the Guru to let him go and die as his brothers were dying before his eyes. He was only a lad of 15 then. "O father I feel an intense desire for death and the feeling rises supreme in my breast that I must go and fight and share this last honours with my brothers." The father lovingly embraced the boy, armed him with a sword and a shield, dressed him fully as a soldier and kissed him. "Go my child, Akal Purakh so wills." The Prince took five other Sikhs-Alim Singh, Jawahir Singh, Dhyan Singh, Sukha Singh and Bir Singh-with him. Ajit Singh performed prodigies of

valour and Mohammedans crumbed under the onslaught of his sword and spear. Zabardust Khan, the viceroy of Lahore, was greatly distressed to witness such destruction in his ranks at the hands of a few Sikhs who were slaying column after column of Mohammedan troops. Such was the frenzy of the Sikhs that with their swords broken and arrows exhausted, they aimed their spears at the enemy. In the midst of the battle, Ajit Singh broke his spear on a Mohammedan. As the enemy made a fresh attack, he was fatally wounded. He fell and slept the sleep of peace on his gory bed. He had died for his faith as was ordained.

Now Jujhar Singh, the second son of the Guru, got ready to contend with the enemy in the true traditions of the Khalsa. "Father, I too wish to go where my brother has gone. "You are too young to fight," said the father. "What is the age father, have I not drank my mother's milk, have I not tasted the sacred nectar? Bless me father, and let me go."

The Guru took Jujhar Singh, only 13, in his lap, wiped his face and dressed him in a beautiful velvet suit embroidered with gold and silver, put a small belt round his little waist, and gave him a miniature sword. He wound a turban on his head, decorated it with a crest and kissed him. "My child," said the Guru, "we do not belong to this earth. Our ancestors live with the Akal Purakh. You are now going; go and wait for me there."

It is said that the boy had gone a little distance when he returned and told his father that he was feeling thirsty. But the Guru, with steel in his heart, said: Go my child! There is no water for you on this earth. See yonder there is a cup of nectar for you where your brother lies. Jujhar Singh then along with five Sikhs rode to fight the Mughal army. Eager to avenge the death of his brother, Jujhar Singh pierced the enemy ranks like a crocodile through a stream. They caused utter destruction in the allied forced before Jujhar Singh and his Sikhs were outnumbered at the end.

Now only five Sikhs remained with the Guru. Daya Singh and Dharam Singh, the only surviving two among the Five Beloved, Man Singh, Sangat Singh and Sant Singh again advised the Guru to affect his escape. The Guru agreed. But before making good his escape, he went on to entrust the Guruship to the Khalsa. So he addressed the remaining Sikhs in the following words:

"I shall ever be among five Sikhs. Wherever there are five Sikhs of mine assembled, they shall be priests of all priests. Wherever there is a sinner, five Sikhs can give him baptism and absolution. Great is the glory of five Sikhs, and whatever they do shall not be in vain. They who give food and clothing to five Sikhs, shall obtain from them the fulfilment of their desires." Saying this, the Guru circumambulated_them three times,

laid his plume and crest in front of them, offered them arms and cried out: Wah Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wah Guru Ji Ki Fateh!

As night fell, Guru Gobind Singh and three of his companions - Daya Singh, Dharam Singh and Mann Singh - prepared to leave the garhi. Sant Singh and Sangat Singh were to stay put and hold on till the end. But before evacuation, he instructed the two to defend the garhi, in the true tradition of the Khalsa, who has always been the defender and never the aggressor. He, then, set the plume on the head of Sant Singh, who greatly resembled the Guru in physical features and made him occupy the top storey, which he along with these companions was soon to vacate. At the same time he also instructed Daya Singh, Dharam Singh and Man Singh to move along the direction of a particular star if they got separated in the melee, which was sure to follow his escape.

But Guru Gobind Singh also declared that before leaving he was going to awaken the enemy lest it accused him later of absconding without warning. The moment Turkish sentries heard the shout and the movement in darkness, they at once got alert. The two sentries holding burning torches in their hands rushed towards the site of sound but they were soon to realize what they were to contend with. Guru Gobind Singh, who excelled in archery and also in swordsmanship like none else, aimed two

arrows at the same time, which first pierced their torches and then passed through their bodies, felling them with a thud.

The commotion that followed was disastrous for the enemy troops, which killed their own kin in great confusion that prevailed during the escape.

Sant Singh and Sangat Singh fought as bravely as they could. Both of them inflicted heavy losses on the enemy but overwhelming numbers of the enemy troops soon scaled the wall of the garhi. The imperial commander thought he was soon going to get the Guru, especially when he saw the plume on the head of Sant Singh, who was ordered to be beheaded by the orders of Khwaja Mardud. But the Mohammedan troops were soon to realize that Sant Singh was not the Guru, who had run to safety amidst such heavy deployment of imperial troops. Sad and dejected at the outcome of the conflict, Zabardast Khan of Lahore and Wazir Khan of Sirhind lumbered back to their cantonments with their surviving soldiers.

Giani Sohan Singh writes while breaking the Mohammedan cordon around Chamkaur, Guru's pair of shoes was left behind. Even though barefoot, he walked in premeditated direction. It was beginning to dawn near Kidi village. Unfortunately, two Gujjars - Alfoo and Ramu - were grazing their cattle at that hour. They recognized the Guru and started raising the alarm. The Guru, already in a

precarious condition, tried to buy their silence by offering gold coins, but the Gujjars would not listen. Having failed to persuade them, the Guru smote them there and then. It was day by the time he reached Behlol village. He sat down under a jand tree in the deep forest here. But there was every likelihood of the enemy catching up. The Guru proceeded further. With constant walk Guru's feet had developed blisters. Separation from his kith and kin, hunger, thirst and no sleep - all failed to dishearten the Guru, who, submitting himself to the Will of the Almighty was still in high spirits. The Guru halted outside Machhiwara near a garden by the side of a well from where he drank water to quench his thirst. Then the Guru lay down on the bare ground to give himself a much-needed rest. On this spot he composed: 'Mitr Piare Nu Hal Muridan da Kehna', a legendary composition, which has since become the signature tune of the Sikhs.

As the Guru had anticipated, his three companions who got separated at Chamkaur, Daya Singh, Dharam Singh and Man Singh, joined Guru Gobind Singh in the forests of Machhiwara, by following a particular star. When the foursome resumed their onward journey, Man Singh carried Guru Gobind Singh on his back since the latter's feet were blistered.

The following 37 who fought and fell in the bloodstained battlefield were the real heroes

of Chamkaur that sacrificed their lives at the sacred word of their Guru, fighting shoulder to shoulder with Him.

1. Kirpal Singh
2. Anak Singh
3. Sanmukh Singh
4. Ajab Singh
5. Ajaib Singh-II
6. Alim Singh
7. Dan Singh
8. Tula Singh or Mala Singh
9. Jawand Singh
10. Bakshish Singh or Bakshash Singh
11. Sher Singh
12. Hukam Singh
13. Sahib Singh
14. Deva Singh
15. Tehl Singh
16. Fateh Singh
17. Dhana Singh
18. Mohar Singh
19. Sukha Singh
20. Kotha Singh
21. Kirat Singh
22. Nahar Singh
23. Mohkam Singh
24. Himmat Singh
25. Ram Singh
26. Ishar Singh
27. Dhian Singh
28. Siam Singh
29. Bir Singh

30. Sant Singh
31. Madan Singh
32. Anand Singh
33. Lal Singh
34. Amolak Singh
35. Sangat Singh
36. Kesara Singh
37. Jawahar Singh

Final Battle

Guru Gobind Singh fought the last battle of his life, the 16th, at Muktsar in May 1705. In those days it was known as Khidrane di Dhab in Punjabi. In this final contest, the Mughal army had to bite the dust. But the Sikhs too paid a heavy for the victory, which they achieved at the cost of 40 committed Sikhs of the Guru. However, the battle had a dramatic beginning, which we will describe in the following terms.

A group of Majha Sikhs was restless having since betrayed the Guru, especially when it came to know that the Guru had undergone such great sufferings at the hands of the Mughal army, with his two elder sons - Prince Ajit Singh and Prince Jujhar Singh - fighting their way to death at Chamkaur; other two sons - Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh - having been bricked alive and his mother Mata Gujri dying of grief at the death of her two innocent grandsons on December 27. 1705. These tales of torture moved them further and they repented their hasty action. They wanted to remove the stain of desertion from their forehead, hoping that the Guru might grant pardon on the one hand and that

He may still need them on the other. With these thoughts in mind, these Sikhs set out in search of the Guru.

However, among themselves they still believed that the Guru should cease all hostilities against the Mughal rule and return to the original creed of Guru Nanak Dev, living in peace. After much search they were able to meet the Guru at last. The deputation of the Majha Sikhs put forward its point of view and tried to argue that in case he accepted their terms, they would use their influence with the emperor to pardon him, otherwise neither would they consider him their Guru nor should he consider them as his Sikhs.

The Guru having listened to their representations, spoke thus: 'If you are indeed my Sikhs, you would receive instruction not give, you have the audacity to come and adjust my quarrels with the emperor, why did you not use your influence when Guru Arjan was tortured to death, where were you when my father Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in Delhi, on your past behaviour I cannot trust you, you betrayed me in the past, what is the guarantee you will not do so in future. Put on record that you are not my Sikhs and me not your Guru.'

The group headed by Mahan Singh drew a formal document to the effect that they renounce the Guru unless he ceases all hostilities against the Turks.

Having done this, the deputation of Majha Sikhs set out to leave.

Before this crucial dialogue took place between the Guru and Majha Sikhs, the Guru during his retreat had reached a village, owned by a Khatri called Rupa. Passing through this village he got the intelligence that a detachment of Mughal army was dangerously too close for comfort but the Guru paid no heed. After the meeting with the Majha deputation, a Sikh who had pitched himself on a tree informed him that the enemy was approaching and might notice their movement. The Guru thus alerted took up his bow and arrows and mounted his horse. He along with his personal guard set out for Khidrana where he was informed of a pond of water in the dense jungle and which he proposed to seize in the event of a conflict.

In the rapidly changing circumstances, five of the Majha Sikhs who a short while ago had renounced the Guru, repented their action and decided to join him at this hour of trial. This turnaround acted as a catalyst for another batch of 35 Sikhs, inducing them to join the Guru, who thus obtained an unexpected but crucial reinforcement of 40 committed Sikhs, ready to lay down their lives for the Guru's just cause in the blood-stained field of danger. Ironically, a woman, Mai Bhago, attired in a man's dress, too joined these ready ranks.

The Guru and his personal guard proceeded to Khidrana but having found no water there,

with tank having run dry, the two decided to enter the nearby forests where they felt greater safety.

Why did the Guru move to Khidrana in the first place? The reason was that the Guru knew he was short of resources, had no troops left with him, water was scarce in the area coupled with arduous routes and formidable obstacles. Lakhi Jungle provided him a perfect protection against the enemy. It served as a safe haven for him. It was no easy for any invading army to enter vast wilderness.

On the other hand 40 men of Majha who had joined the Guru started for Khidrana and encamped there.

Soon the army of Wazir Khan was on them, with Wazir himself ordering the army to charge the Sikhs who stood to oppose him. He also believed the Guru to be among the Sikhs. The confrontation began in no time. The 40 Sikhs of the Guru took the first volley of attack with traditional bravery. In a pitched battle, the Mohammedans appeared tottering against the Sikh onslaught but were rallied by Wazir Khan who exhorted them to fight the handful of Sikhs and not shame their race, by failing to hold on against a few infidels. But Sikhs were by then in a fiercely fighting mode. First a batch of five Sikhs charged at the Mohammedan army, but they were riddled with bullets, 10 more advanced with the same intention, cutting down column

after column of the enemy, who fell in heaps before the Sikh hurricane. When they fell, 11 more Sikhs rushed at the enemy and smote them down. Ultimately, they fell against the superior numbers of the imperial forces, but not before taking heavy toll of the Mohammedan army.

While the action took place below, the Guru who had taken up a position atop a sand hill was discharging arrows at the enemy camp with deadly precision, with Mohammedan troops failing to gauge from which direction rain of death and destruction was pouring on them.

As the contest came to a close, Wazir Khan thought the Guru must have been killed; he deployed the remaining army to search for his body. In the meantime, the enemy was in dire straits, with water having run dry at Khidrana. It was feared then that the surviving troops might die of thirst, had they not found water immediately. Wazir Khan, it is said, was told that water could be found 30 miles in front but only 10 miles in the rear, it was against this backdrop of knowledge that the Mughal army was ordered back, so much so that they abandoned their dead and wounded behind, such was the desperate bid to reach water.

When the Mughal army departed, the Guru climbed down the hill and went to survey the battlefield, to tend to the wounded and perform obsequies of the dead. All 40 Sikhs, who had joined him on second thought after

renunciation, lay dead before his very eyes, fighting for his cause. Overwhelmed with emotion, the Guru touched each body, wiped the face, extolling his unsurpassed valour. Amidst the dead lay the leader of the jatha, Mahan Singh, who was still breathing. The Guru wiped his face, took him in his arms and asked him to seek any boon - from empire to salvation - but Mahan Singh, lying in the lap of his spiritual master, desired to cancel the deed of renunciation, a wish which the Guru immediately fulfilled. No sooner did the Guru tear the document than Mahan Singh, who was already breathing heavily, passed away in Guru's arms.

But before that the Guru paid his tribute of love by hugging each dead to his breast, by lauding his gallantry and resigning him to the care of the Timeless One. Few names in history are remembered with greater fervour than theirs. There is no Sikh from whose lips a prayer does not go forth each night, before his retiring for the night, invoking the blessings of the most high in the name of the Forty, and rightly so. Before Mahan Singh breathed his last in the arms of the Guru, the assurance was given to him that the Forty Warriors had been granted immortality. Wherever a Sikh offers ardas (prayer), at a gurdwara in any part of the world, the mention of 40 Muktas is made along with Gurus and four Sahibzadas (sons of Guru Gobind Singh).

Those 40 Sikhs who fought for the Guru's faith and liberated themselves are, in Sikh parlance, called 40 *Mukte* or Muktas, or the 40 Liberated Ones. It is in their memory that a fair is held every year on the first of Magh. Since that time, Khidrana is known as Muktsar Sahib as a tribute to the valour of the 40 Sikh heroes. The event took place on December 29, 1705.

The following is the list of Sikhs who fought under the Guru's standard in his last battle at Khidrana:

1. Mahan Singh
2. Mahla Singh
3. Darbara Singh
4. Vir Singh
5. Mansa Singh
6. Parsa Singh
7. Gura Singh
8. Ajaib Singh
9. Sher Singh
10. Narayan Singh
11. Sant Singh
12. Parma Singh
13. Sorja Singh
14. Bachittar Singh
15. Mastan Singh
16. Phula Singh
17. Champa Singh
18. Khan Singh
19. Dip Singh
20. Makhan Singh

21. Ganda Singh
22. Sadhu Singh
23. Jiwan Singh
24. Mula Singh
25. Bhag Singh
26. Kapur Singh
27. Mitha Singh
28. Garu Singh
29. Jassa Singh
30. Chuber Singh
31. Mani Singh
32. Bhag Singh
33. Mansa Singh
34. Taru Singh
35. Bishan Singh
36. Gurbux Singh
37. Hari Singh
38. Bulaka Singh
39. Babeka Singh
40. Ram Singh

Final March

The battle-weary Guru made a flying visit to Bazipur near Ferozepore. On his return, he moved southward. His main aim to move into the heartland of the Brars was to infuse the spirit of Sikhism. Passing through Rupana, Bhundar, Gurusar, Thehri, Kot Bhai and Kot Sahib Chand, the Guru arrived at Chattiana. At this spot stands Guptsar Sahib Gurdwara in memory of Guru's visit. A strange incident happened here. The Brars, who were accompanying Guru Gobind Singh, held the reins of his horse and demanded arrears of pay under threat of stopping his advance further. It must also be remembered here that the populace in the area consisted mostly of illiterate Jat Sikhs. So, one would hardly expect any discretion or courtesy from such lot. At that time the Guru had no money. By God's grace it so happened that a devout Sikh from the area brought enough money to pay them arrears. However, the leader of the Brars, Chaudhary Dana, felt ashamed of the insolent behaviour of people and refused to accept payment for himself. His act of abnegation impressed the Guru so much, that on his request, the former immediately agreed to visit his place Mehma Swai. At Mehma

Swai, the Guru encamped at a place called Lakhisar and from there he made a visit to Dana's home.

He was still at Lakhisar when the Guru got an invitation from Chaudhary Dalla, an influential Mohammedan from the area. Therefore, the Guru decided to go to Talwandi Sabo, Damdama Sahib is only about 30 miles from this place. In reaching there, the Guru followed the same route and once again passed through Chhattiana, Kot Sahib Chand, and Kot Bhai and reached Gidderbaha. Further on he visited Rohila, Jangirana, Bambiha, Bajam, Kal Jhirani, Jassi Bagwali, Pakka Kalan and Chak Hira Singh before he reached Talwandi Sabo. The area appealed to him so much that he decided to assume a permanent residence here. In total, the Guru stayed at this place nine months and nine days.

It would not be inappropriate to say that Talwandi Sabo, now called Damdama Sahib, assumed the position and status of Anandpur, the original capital of the Sikhs, for almost a new town developed in the Lakhi Jungle.

The Sikhs started visiting the Guru from far and wide and with them came the provisions – it fused a new spirit into the Khalsa, which had passed through a turbulent period not long ago. Many poets and scholars of repute too joined the Guru's durbar at Damdama Sahib. The situation so turned or life took such a curve that Sikhs again started going on

hunting expeditions in nearby dense forests. It is estimated that far more people, some records say 10 times the number of the people that used to gather at Anandpur Sahib, started descending on Damdama Sahib.

The Guru's stay in Malwa totally transformed the people; many got converted to Sikhism. His sojourn at Talwandi Sabo is remarkable for two things in particular. First, Guru's charismatic personality left a deep impression on the minds of the people who took it as a great privilege to take baptism at his hands to enter the fold of Sikhism. People visiting him, ordinary and humble Sikhs, devotees and others were estimated at more than 10 times the number of people visiting him at Anandpur.

Notes Koer Singh in *Gurbilas Patshahi-Dasween*

"Every day would the Guru distribute gold and silver coins,
Countless soldiers were thus lured to the place."

The second great achievement was the preparation of the final recension of Adi Granth. The Guru had decided to abolish the apostolic succession and wanted to confer guruship on the holy granth. Bhai Mani Singh prepared the final copy of the Holy Scripture under the superintendence of Guru Gobind Singh, who included the hymns and slokas of Guru Tegh Bahadur and one slok of his own. Daily, the Guru dictated Gurbani to

Bhai Mani Singh and in the evening he would explain meaning of what was recorded in the morning to the assembly of Sikhs.

The word Damdama originates from 'dum', meaning rest. It means Damdama was the place where the Guru had taken rest after his long succession of battles. The Guru here devoted his energies to the republic of letters. The place of poetry, music, art, philosophy and scholarship is high in the Sikh scale of values. Once again the Guru assembled around him great literary minds as he had previously done at Paonta Sahib.

On October 30, 1706, Guru Gobind Singh left Talwandi Sabo and set out towards the Deccan in order to meet emperor to whom he had already dispatched Zafarnama, an epistle of victory in Persian; reminding him of his misdeeds committed in the name of the holy 'Quran and betraying the Guru; in the hands of his two beloved Daya Singh and Dharam Singh. The Guru had been waiting for their return to know the issue of deliverance of the letter. But with arrival delayed, the Guru could wait no longer because it was in his knowledge that Aurangzeb was then too old and ill, and may not survive long and that his crucial meeting with the monarch may remain in limbo. It was against this backdrop that the Guru, without waiting any further for his emissaries, set out for the Deccan.

At the time of departure the Guru asked Dalla to accompany him but he showed

reluctance. Further, Brars in his service also tried to dissuade him from undertaking the journey to the south. When the Guru refused to listen to them, they left his service. The Guru was now left with only Dalla Singh, two grandsons of Bhai Bhagtu; Ram Singh and his brother Fateh Singh, Param Singh and Dharm Singh (not to be associated with Dharam Singh, one of the Beloved Five), descendants of Bhai Rupa and Bhai Mani Singh, the biographer of Adi Granth.

It is commonly believed that Guru Gobind Singh went to the south only once; there have been various shades of opinion on the issue among academics and historians but the latest facts point out that Guru Gobind Singh made two journeys to the south.

Then there is another difference of opinion among scholars about the motive of his visit(s) to the south. One school of thought held that the Guru wanted to weld together Rajputs and Marathas to put up a united front against the highhandedness, cruelty and tyranny of the decaying Mughal power. Some historians held the view that the younger son of Aurangzeb, Bahadur Shah, was a friend of the Guru, with the former beseeching the latter to accompany him to the south, so at that time all kinds of opinions prevailed.

But one must remember that the Guru was no ordinary mortal who would go on a sightseeing trip with the new emperor. More

pressing problems stood on his agenda. He wanted peace to prevail in the country by removing any distinction on the basis of caste, colour, class or social order. He wanted engines of oppression against people on the basis of race and religion to stop forever.

In our view the real motive behind Guru's south visit was to impress upon emperor Aurangzeb the fairness and just approach of his cause. Aurangzeb was to be blamed for all misuse of his official machinery against him, his family and above all his Sikhs. The Guru also intended to underline the fact that his real conflict was with the crafty hill Hindu chiefs, who were idol-worshippers while he saw himself as an idol-breaker. But it was ironical while Aurangzeb prided in calling himself an idol-destroyer, he chose not to side with an idol-breaker but with idol-worshipers. He directed all his resources; men and machines against the Guru and his newly founded order, to the aid of the hill chiefs.

Guru Gobind Singh and his handful of followers left Talwandi Sabo for the south on October 30, 1706. The Guru's main aim was to meet emperor Aurangzeb, who stayed at Ahmad Nagar in Maharashtra.

Their first march out of Talwandi Sabo was to Kewal, thence to Jhorar, thence to Jhanda and thence to Sarsa. Dalla Singh who had reluctantly agreed to move on with the Guru absconded along with a few Brars in the dead of the night. The Guru and his party moved

further to Nauhar, about 20 miles from Sarsa. Though the inhabitants were rich, they did not come forward with supplies for the Guru. In fact, there was great commotion in the market because a Sikh had accidentally killed a pigeon.

The Guru next proceeded to Bahaduran and then to Madhu Singhana. He then moved to Pushkar, a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus. The Guru and his Sikhs further moved to Narainpur, generally known as Dadudawara since a saint by the name of Dadu lived there.

The party now moved to Lali, then to Magharoda, and then to Kulait. Here the Guru met Daya Singh and Dharam Singh who had been sent to deliver Zafarnama to Aurangzeb in person. It is probable that when the two reached the emperor, he was ill. The two chosen followers informed the Guru that the emperor suffered from colic. His next march was to Baghaur where he ultimately heard of Aurangzeb's death, which occurred on February 21, 1707. The emperor had three sons - Bahadur Shah, Mohammed Azim Shah, called Tara Azim by Sikhs, and Mohammed Kam Baksh.

Soon afterwards, the Guru decided to return. The places that are associated with his visit indicate that he was moving towards Delhi.

With Aurangzeb's death, the traditional war of succession had begun. Mohammed Muazzam, more popularly known as Bahadur Shah, was in Afghanistan when the emperor

died. On hearing the news, he left Jamrud in the last week of March 1707 and reached Peshawar on the last day of the month. His trusted governor of Lahore, Munim Khan, had kept his troops in full gear for the long awaited war of succession. Muazzam was declared the emperor formally even before he entered Lahore. Wazir Khan, the faujdar of Sirhind, too contributed Rs 8 lakh for his cause.

Mohammed Muazzam entered Delhi in the first week of June 1707, took possession of treasuries at Agra and proceeded towards Dholpur to oppose Azam Shah, another claimant to the throne. Guru Gobind Singh who was also moving towards Delhi met Mohammed Muazzam around this time in the midst of such turmoil.

But M.A. Macauliffe gives a different route map to the Mughal throne. He writes when Bahadur Shah heard that his younger brother Azim Shah had usurped the throne, he immediately consulted his old friend, Nand Lal, a well-known scholar now in the employ of Guru Gobind Singh, as to how he should claim the Mughal crown from the hands of his younger brother. Nand Lal naturally advised him to seek Guru's assistance. When the Guru was approached, he not only promised help but also sovereignty in case Bahadur Shah agreed to a request he was to make to him and did not betray him like his father Aurangzeb. The king-aspirant was more than

happy to accept these vague conditions for help, which was crucial for him to seize the power. Guru Gobind Singh then sent Dharam Singh with some trusty Sikhs to the assistance of Bahadur Shah whereas he himself, realising that the political situation was in a state of flux, headed towards north in the hope of meeting Bahadur Shah.

Guru Gobind Singh's keenness to meet Bahadur Shah is understandable. Aurangzeb's death had left the issue unsolved, so he must have been thinking of resolving the same issue with the new emperor once the war of succession was over. When Bahadur Shah had fully equipped his forces, he marched to Agra at the head of a great army. His brother Tara Azim was in distant Ahmad Nagar but on hearing the advance of Bahadur Shah, he marched by Gwalior to contend with him. The two armies met at Dholpur and after a great battle, which lasted for three days, Tara Azim and his principal officers were slain. His remaining army fled from the field, leaving Bahadur Shah the undisputed monarch of India.

Before Bahadur Shah, his father Aurangzeb had also become emperor by killing his own kin in consistent with the tradition of the Mughal dynasty. The victorious emperor returned to Agra and sent Dharam Singh to the Guru to thank him for the assistance and convey him the news of victory. Thus, Bahadur Shah became new emperor on

June 18, 1707. On the other hand when the Guru learnt of his victory, he resolved to march to Agra from Delhi, where he had encamped on the left bank of the Yamuna, to personally congratulate the new emperor, leaving his wives in Delhi in the care of his Sikhs. Bahadur Shah sent a messenger to the Guru to expedite his departure for Agra. The messenger explained that the king feared the bigotry of fellow Mohammedans were he himself to pay the first visit. On the third day of his departure the Guru arrived at Mathura and encamped at Suraj Kund.

When Guru Gobind Singh reached Agra, he was accorded an honourable reception as he was allowed to go fully armed into emperor's presence. The emperor duly thanked him for his assistance. He was given a costly present with a *khilat* as is evident from an entry in *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-u-Mualla* (Jaipur), dated July 24, 1707. Bahadur Shah also invited Guru Gobind Singh to spend some time with him, an invitation, which the Guru accepted.

What transpired on this occasion between the emperor and the Guru was soon conveyed to the Khalsa in Punjab. After mentioning about the jewelled scarf and *khilat* presented to him by the emperor, the Guru expressed his satisfaction with 'other matters.' He then informed the Khalsa that he would soon be returning to Punjab after a few days.

But fate willed otherwise. Guru Gobind Singh could not return to Anandpur.

After spending a few months at Agra, the Guru now explicitly made a request, which he had several times hinted at. He asked Bahadur Shah to hand over Wazir Khan of Sirhind who was the murderer of his two innocent children. The emperor shuddered at the very thought and naturally asked the Guru as to what he intended to do with him. The Guru replied that he would have life for life in accordance with the law of retaliation contained in the emperor's sacred book. But Bahadur Shah was not prepared for it; however, he chose to be discreet. Handling the ticklish issue tactfully, he did not straightway reject the demand, but said he would discuss the issue with his ministers. However, in his heart he thought if he handed over Wazir Khan to the Sikh Guru, he might see a mutiny in the army.

We may also remind the reader that earlier in the book we had mentioned how when Bahadur Shah began his march from Jamrud in Afghanistan to first Lahore and then to Delhi, he had been collecting troops and money for the campaign against Tara Azim. On the way to Delhi and Agra, Wazir Khan had helped him to the tune of Rs 8 lakh. So the financial help to his cause must be afresh in his mind. Therefore, he requested the Guru to wait for a year until his rule was more firmly established. But the Guru was in no mood to accept his falsehood. He accused the emperor of betraying him like his father and

prophesied that a Sikh should rise, who should call the false and counterfeit to account and kill all his viceroys, priests and magistrates and bring downfall of the Mughal empire. The inference is to Banda Singh Bahadur of whom we would hear further in the book. Despite this blunt language that the Guru used, the emperor invited him on a visit to Jaipur and other cities. The Guru too accepted the offer and promised to join him on his march. The Guru and the emperor continued their journey to the Narbada River. Both the Mughal and the Sikh camps moved within a few miles of each other.

Historians J.S Grewal and S.S.Bal write that Bahadur Shah was sagacious enough to realise that Guru Gobind Singh's awkward presence near the royal camp was preferable to his dangerous freedom in Punjab where he could mobilise resources against the not-so-settled government. The new emperor knew that with the issue of accession to the throne not yet fully settled, it was paramount to secure peace in the northwest. He could ill-afford to offend either the hill chiefs or the Guru. So his diplomatic gestures of goodwill and kindness towards the Sikh Guru were all the more impressive for their political, albeit negative, advantage to the emperor. At the same time an atmosphere of distrust and hostility prevailed. Besides, a few Mohammedan soldiers some of whose relatives had been killed by Sikhs at

Anandpur kept the steady quarrel between Sikhs and Mohammedan army alive. With a view to resolving the issue, Guru Gobind Singh deputed Bhai Man Singh, one of the survivors of Chamkaur who had never parted company with the Guru. Before he could help the two sides patch up, a fanatic assassinated him. The emperor was much distressed to hear of his death and ordered that the murderer should be handed over to the Guru for punishment, but the Guru forgave him.

The reader would remember that this was the same Bhai Man Singh who had carried Guru Gobind Singh on his back when the Guru's feet were blistered, on having walked barefoot from Chamkaur to the Machhiwara forest. The Guru and the emperor continued their journey to Burhanpur where the inhabitants had prepared a house for the Guru, who spent some time there. In the meantime, the emperor continued his journey further while the Guru was left behind at Burhanpur. But after a few days, the emperor again wrote to the Guru to join him. The Guru again accepted the offer. Both of them proceeded to Poona and then to Nanded. While the Guru halted at Nanded, the imperial army left the environs of Nanded for Hyderabad where the new emperor was pressed upon to crush the rebellion of his younger brother Kam Baksh.

Final Phase

Nanded was first known as Nau Nand Dehru because it is believed that nine rikhis lived there in prehistoric times. Till the fourth century it was still a place of importance and was the capital of a small kingdom. However, its fortifications have all perished with lapse of time and there is no trace of any ancient site.

The Guru arrived in Nanded with some infantry and about 200 or 300 cavalry, mostly equipped with lances. The Guru selected a very congenial spot for his residence, overlooking the river. Soon, he started addressing people from all walks of life besides his own Sikhs. But his missionary activity soon attracted the wrath of original inhabitants of Nanded and there took place an armed conflict between the followers of a Bairagi, then known as Madho Das, and the Sikhs. Bairangi's followers were worsted in the encounter.

But British scholar and author of *The Sikh* Religion M.A. Mecauliffe gives a different picture of Guru's entry into Nanded.

According to him, the Guru went to the hut of the Bairagi, who was not present at that time. But the Guru had heard how the Bairagi possessed magical powers and could overthrow anyone who dared to occupy his couch. Regardless of Bairagi's reputation, he occupied the couch and made himself comfortable. Not content with this the Guru also shot a goat to prepare a dish. It was a sacrilege to kill an animal at Bairagi's hut besides of course sitting on his couch. A disciple rushed to inform the Bairagi what had happened in his absence. Soon the Bairagi appeared on the scene and demanded to know why the Guru had occupied his hut, which first belonged to his own guru and now to him and that he could never tolerate any stranger occupy his seat of power.

The Guru calmly replied that he had arrived in Nanded greatly fatigued. Moreover, he had heard of Bairagi's hospitality and philanthropy; he just found it an ample opportunity of testing favourable accounts of the place. The words left a magic effect on Madho Das, who felt that he had at last encountered a truly great man. He called himself his Banda - his slave - the name by which he has been known in the annals of Sikh history. So, the encounter with the Guru resulted in Banda's conversion to Sikhism. He accepted the *pahul* and *rehat* of the Khalsa.

Banda's original name was Lachmandev, son of Ramdev Rajput and was a native of Rajouri in Poonch in Jammu. Before he adopted a religious role, he practiced the use of firearms and devoted to chase. Once when he killed a female deer, he found two young ones in her womb. They died in front of his eyes, the sight shook him no end and he decided to renounce the world. He became a disciple of faqir Janaki Prasad. As a wandering sadhu he made it to the source of the Godavari at Nasik. There he erected a hut. Then a Jogi visited him, who instructed him in the science of Jog and incantations. Thus accomplished, he set out again along the course of the Godavari and reached Nanded. With passage of time he came to be known as a holy man who was in possession of many charms. He used to pray and perform over a little mound overlooking the river.

The Guru, on the other hand, was quite impressed with the seclusion of Nanded of which place he decided to make a permanent abode for himself. He used to offer prayers and meditate on a small stone structure on the margin of the flowing river. Near it is a little larger building where the Holy Scripture was read at that time.

As mentioned earlier, Banda was baptized and given instructions in the tenets of Sikhism. On being baptized he was given the name of Gurbaksh Singh but he continued to be called as Banda. Soon, he developed great

affection for his religious teacher and accordingly asked the Guru one day if he could perform any service for him. The Guru after a reflection thought that he had to settle a score in Punjab. The Guru said: "I have come into this world to consolidate the faith and destroy oppressors, are you prepared to assist me in this task?" Banda volunteered to take up any enterprise on his Guru's behalf. It was then that he ordered Banda to enter the plains of Punjab and wreak vengeance on the enemies of the Khalsa. The Guru said: "Though you have called yourself my slave, yet you will be the exalted of all."

Addressing thus, the Guru gave him five arrows. But before sending Banda off to Punjab, the Guru armed him with the core of warriors. This included Baba Binod Singh and his son Kahn Singh, both descendants of Guru Angad Dev, the second Guru, and Baz Singh, a descendant of third Guru of the Sikhs, Amar Das, who were also advised to give further instructions in the Sikh religion besides assisting him in the said enterprise. With them the Guru sent another jatha of five Sikhs. He then ordered Banda to proceed towards the Yamuna and wait at a little distance from Buria where he would receive further reinforcements, which he would cause to be sent. But before departure the Guru instructed Banda to cut off the head of Wazir Khan, governor of Sirhind himself and not delegate this task to any subordinate.

So instructed and well armed, Banda set out for Punjab to accomplish the Guru's task, no less formidable under any circumstances. He was armed with the Guru's standard and kettledrum. The clarion call in the name of the Guru stirred the old bones of the Jat peasantry who swung into action, to avenge all crimes inflicted on the young body of the Khalsa. Men in great numbers began to join his camp. In what rapidly became a millennial resistance movement, Banda preached sermons, gave benedictions and welcomed those ready to convert to Sikhism. He offered refuge to anyone 'threatened by thieves, dacoits or highway robbers, troubled by Mohammedan bigots, or in any way subjected to injustice or ill-treatment.' Banda's main appeal laid in those parts of the sub-Himalayan interfluvial zones and Delhi provinces where Jat peasants, too anxious for recognition, responded to his egalitarian appeal. The Sikhs posed a regional threat to the Mughal dominance. Banda the Brave achieved dramatic victories. Between 1709 and late 1710 the Sikhs under Banda Singh Bahadur achieved successes in the territories of Sirhind, Hisar and Saharanpur, which were all close to Delhi and set up his capital at Mukhlispur. But he started by devastating Sadhaura and ended up sacking Sirhind, putting Wazir Khan to his bloodthirsty sword. In the words of some Mohammedan chroniclers, Banda razed Sirhind to ground,

inflamed by the brutal memories of the two younger sons of the Guru - Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, Banda allowed the ancient town to plunder, loot and mayhem for three days - to savour the sweet revenge for the martyrdom of Guru's innocent sons and mother. Greek historian Thucydides cites a proverb to the effect that the gratification of revenge is the sweetest feeling among mortals.

Some Muslim writers go to the extent of claiming that even the graves in Sirhind were dug open. But to Banda goes the undiluted credit of launching a full-scale rebellion against the Mughal authority. Even otherwise, the quelling of rebellion by the Sikhs by no means meant the end to the Sikh resistance, which again rose to establish itself, by steadily consolidating on its earlier gains, in the establishment of the Sikh raj in the beginning of the 19th century.

Everlasting Guru

After the departure of Banda Singh Bahadur for Punjab, Guru Gobind Singh lived at various places in Nanded. There are a number of places where he lived before he chose the last resting place for himself. For mention, there is Shikar Ghat where he used to go for hunting, Nagina Ghat where a valuable signet ring presented to him by a Sikh was flung into the river and also Hira Ghat where the Guru threw a diamond ring presented by the emperor into the water.

Another prominent place was Sangat Sahib where the Guru held his assemblies to address his Sikhs daily.

According to Macauliffe, it was at Sangat Sahib that a Multani Sikh brought for the Guru a bow and two arrows. To test the equipment the Guru discharged one of the arrows. Afterwards, the Guru sent one of his Sikhs to identify where the arrow had fallen. When the Sikh informed the Guru of the spot, he decided to choose this final abode for him in Nanded. It is this place where the present gurdwara of Sri Hazoor Sahib stands today.

Maharaja Ranjeet Singh had built it in 1832, even in defiance of the Guru's orders.

The history mentions the name of one Chanda Singh having been sent all the way from Punjab to Nanded with an initial amount of Rs 25,000. Having seen the devotion of the Maharaja, the Nizam of Hyderabad set aside the revenue of five villages - Bishanpuri, Bari, Bansari, Masor and Elki- for the maintenance of the shrine. That time the yearly revenue amounted to Rs 18,000 and a similar sum was given by the state to Sikh priests who were responsible for the upkeep of Sri Hazoor Sahib, Abchalnagar, Nanded.

When a fanatic Afghan stabbed the Guru during one of his evening assemblies where all sorts of people gathered to listen to him besides his own Sikhs, he felt that his end was near. But before that Guru Gobind Singh decided to confer investiture of spiritual authority on Guru Granth Sahib, declaring in complete unambiguous terms that after him the Granth will be the Guru and the Guru the Granth. It was not just explained in an explicit terms, but a proper ceremony was performed by Guru Gobind Singh, anointing the Granth the last Guru. With this act of the Tenth Master, Guru Granth Sahib became physical manifestation of all the Ten Gurus. *Sharir panth vich, atma granth vich.* There is historical evidence to show that Guru Gobind Singh had finally ended the physical accession of gurgaddi after him. From then

on while Guru Gobind Singh became the last and the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib became the Everlasting Guru of the Sikhs after him.

History, as they say, is a record of truthful events as they occurred at a particular time. We will not lure a reader into legends, so often associated with prophets of all religions but would only focus on chronology of events to underline the historical truth.

Sohan, a poet as well as an author, began writing *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* in May 1717 and completed the work on July 22, 1718. This oldest record regarding the investiture of spiritual authority on Granth Sahib leaves no doubt about the recognition by the Sikhs of the Guruship of Guru Granth Sahib after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. This valuable work saw the light of the day within 10 years of Guru's death and hence can be relied upon as the most truthful event, dispelling any mist of doubt, if at all. The fourth chapter of the book is devoted to the compilation of the holy book by Guru Arjun Dev and first 12 verses of the fifth chapter relate to the formal installation of the Granth at the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, as it was originally called and known then. There the author has used the then accepted prefix Guru with the Granth and has called it Guru Granth (Sahib). Those who may still doubt will do well to read the following English translation of the related verses (in which the Guru is

seen addressing his Sikhs just before his last farewell):

'Hear ye all, this precept of mine as true and certain,
Recognise the Granth to be the same as the Guru,
Think not of any difference between the two.
In the Kali-yuga, Guru Granth has assumed the form of Sri Guru.
Recognise Guru Granth to be the very self of the Ten Gurus.
He, who wishes to see the Guru, let him see Guru Granth.
And, he who wishes to speak to the Guru let him read Guru Granth with a devoted mind.'

This work appeared within 10 years of Guru Gobind Singh's death and can be thus relied upon as the most reliable record of the spiritual authority conferred upon Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded just before his demise.

There are sufficient records available to us which prove beyond any shadow of doubt that before his death, the Guru told his Sikhs that he was not appointing anyone to succeed him as the Guru, that he was entrusting the Khalsa to Sri (Granth) Sahib and the Shabad (Word) as given in the Granth Sahib which should be accepted by all. This has been recorded in *Guru Sahib Daswen Patsahah ji ke joti jot samawane ka Prasang,* an account based on

the information received from the companions of the Guru himself.

In 1751 AD, Koer Singh wrote *Gurbilas Patshahi Das*, making liberal use of Sri Gur Sobha. But in this work he has worked on a broader canvas, giving a coherent and extensive picture of the life of Guru Gobind Singh. In between he has also launched a scathing attack on the so-called saint(s), self-appointed religious teachers. He has shown them in very poor light, going from house to house and begging for alms. Writes Koer Singh of them: 'Without meditation, these people call themselves saints, while in their minds they think of other people's women. So, in dark age of Kali, the real saints have disappeared like sun in the clouds.' "Therefore my virtuous Sikhs," says the Guru, "should acknowledge Guru Granth as supreme and worthy of worship" and not a pretender saint. Koer Singh then goes on to refer to the words of Guru Gobind Singh in the next verses:

"Recognise Ten of our incarnations when your family will be supreme.
When the Ten incarnations disappear (from this world with the death of Tenth one), the ancestral line, *kul,* will not continue."

That is how Guru Gobind Singh is reported to have addressed his Sikhs when they sought the Word, advice:

"It is no longer the time for Guruship; I will not anoint anyone (now).
Consider the entire Khalsa to have been entrusted to the protection (lap) of the Wielder of the Sword - the Divine Protector.
I have given to you to hold the sheet of the embodiment of Word. He who accepts it shall be an incomparable-really true-Singh.
Recognise Sri Granth ji as ever-ready (readily available, ever present) *darshan* (sight, appearance or embodiment of the Guru."

At one stage, the Guru says: "Bring it here to this place". Following this the holy book was brought to him. When informed, he said: "Let us go to the Adi Sat-Guru (the great Adi Guru Granth Sahib)."

Then he got up along with all his Sikhs, took five paise and a coconut with him, offered them himself (to the Holy Book), bowed down, circumambulated with all reverence and said:

"He who wishes to talk to me should read (Guru) Granth Sahib and receive peace of mind.
There is no other Guru equal to it. Without any hesitation, I utter this truth.
There is no other Guru like it anywhere. Therefore, it should be accepted as Ten Gurus.
With its study *(darshan)* sins disappear. And by realizing its Word in practice, salvation is obtained."

Writer Koer Singh has not only imparted to us important details, he also tells us in explicit terms that Guru Gobind Singh discontinued the line of personal Guruship and did not appoint anyone to succeed him. In fact, Guru Gobind Singh had surrendered his personality to the Khalsa when he became one of them during the first baptism ceremony and he publicly declared this merger at a number of occasions afterwards and especially just before his death at Nanded.

Entrusting the Khalsa to the care of the Divine Protector as declared by the Great Master, Koer Singh gives vivid description of the formal installation of Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru.

The reader must remember here that Koer Singh had been in close touch with Bhai Mani Singh who remained in close company of the Guru; not only this, he was also appointed the First Reader of Guru Granth Sahib in the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar by Mata Sundari after the Guru's death, thus he (Mani Singh) was the best informed person on the subject in addition to being the most qualified to explain the significance of the Holy Book to Koer Singh.

"The Granth is the Guru: you hold the garment (seek the protection) of the Timeless God."

-bachan kita Granth hai Guru, lar pakro Akal-

There is another very reliable record in the *Sakhian Patshahi Das* chapter of *Mehma Parkash* written by a descendant of third Guru Amar Das, Sarup Das Bhalla, who completed his work in January 1801. The record on the whole is said to be the nearest to the truth. Bhalla writes 'The Guru called the Sikhs to his presence and he was pleased to see them. The Sikhs then asked him where they would have the *darshan* (of the Guru). The Great Guru, merciful to the lowly, said: "Our ten forms have come to an end. Now recognize Guru Granth Sahib in my place. He who wishes to talk to me should read the Adi Granth Sahib. This will be like talking to me. I have entrusted you to the lap of the Almighty."

Munshi Sant Singh, vakil of the Bedis, wrote an account of the Bedi family of Una under the title of the *Bayan-i-Khandan-i-Karamat Nishan-i-Bedian* from the time of Guru Nanak Dev to that of Baba Sujan Singh. The work was completed in May 1865.

'Just before the death of Guru Gobind Singh, all the Singhs and disciples asked him as to who would be the future Guru.' The Guru then said: "Guru Khalsa, Khalsa Guru. He who shall observe the Sikh rehat maryada or the rules of conduct and morality and meditation, him know ye to be very myself." Then thinking that there should be a definite centre of faith for all the Sikhs, the Guru with

five paise and a coconut in his hand (as offering) bowed before Guru Granth Sahib and said: "Ye all community should recognize Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru after me and obey the commandments contained therein. Then he uttered the following couplet:

Guru Granth ji manyo pargat gura (n) ki deh,
Jo Sikh muhe milbo chhe, khoj isi mein leh.

(Recognise Guru Granth as the visible body of the Gurus. The Sikh who wishes to meet me should find me therein.)

In his work the author has mentioned the last commandment of Guru Gobind Singh in the words of Bhai Nand Lal who was present at Nanded at the time of the Guru's death. What better and more reliable authority could be on the subject than him?

The latest and revised manuscript of Panth Parkash written by Giani Gian Singh, the Punjabi tutor to Maharaja Ranjit Singh for three years, prepared by the author towards the end of his life for publication by Hafiz Qutd-ud-Din of Lahore also has a mention of Guru Gobind Singh having formally installing Guru Granth Sahib as the Guru after him.

Author Har Sukh Rai in *Majma-ul-Akhbar* (1799-1805 AD) says that Guru Gobind Singh 'is the Tenth Mahal and is the last *Zahur* (appearance or successor) of Guru Nanak.'

Tarikh-i-Muzaffari (1810 AD) and Tarikh-i-Bahr-ul-Mawwaj (1806-37 AD) are two important works written by Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari who has penned down the history of the Mughals to the beginning of Akbar Shah II. These works also mention the Sikh struggle against the Mughals and the Durranis. Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari writes in *Tarikh-i-Muzaffari* that "after him (Guru Gobind Singh) according to the faith of these people (the Sikhs) the descending of Guruship and of internal spiritualism came to an end and the book, the Granth, was established in place of the Guru.

Another writer Ahmed bin Muhammed Ali completed his work *Mirat-ul-Ahwal-i-Jahan Numa.* According to it, "the sons of Guru Gobind Singh had been killed in the battle of Alamgir. After him there is no *khalifah* (successor, guru).

Umdat-ut-Tawarikh by Lala Sohan Lal Suri is a very important work on the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors up to 1849. Though its first volume dealing with the Guru and the misl periods was published in 1885, it was originally begun in the form of notes in the middle of the 18th century during the time of Sohan Lal Suri's grandfather and father, Lala Hakumat Rai and Lala Ganpat Rai.

It mentions the last moments of Guru's death when a disciple asks the Guru as to whom he has appointed as Guru after him.

Thereupon the Guru replies, "the Guru is Granth ji. There is no difference between the Granth and the Guru. From the *darshan* of Granth ji one shall have the happy *darshan* of the Guru Sahib."

The next book we refer to is *History of the Panjab* by Syed Muhammed Latif. It was published in 1891 and is considered one of the best on this subject. Latif writes that some time before the death of Guru Gobind Singh when Sikhs asked who would be the Guru after him, the dying apostolic hero, said:

"I entrust my Khalsa to the bosom of the ever-lasting divine being. Whoever wishes to behold the Guru, let him offer karah parshad worth Re 1.4 or less, and bow before the Granth and open it, and he shall be given an interview with the Guru. The Granth shall support you under all your troubles and adversities in this world, and be a sure guide to you hereafter. The Guru shall dwell with the society of disciples, the Khalsa, and wherever there shall be five Sikhs gathered together, there shall the Guru be also present."

The Guru also gave them sundry warnings, telling them that there were impostors in the world who would try to dissuade them from the right path, but that his disciples should be on their guard and give no ear to what they say.

We would again quote Macauliffe, who wrote *The Sikh Religion* in six volumes. This voluminous book was started in the eighties

of the 19th century and is most reliable and authentic work on the lives of the Gurus and the Bhaktas. No doubt Macauliffe was the chief author but he was assisted in the mission by such great scholars like Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha, Bhai Hazara Singh, Bhai Sardul Singh and Bhai Dit Singh. Thus *The Sikh Religion* represents views and beliefs not only of the orthodox Sikh society but also of the reformist intelligentsia in the 20th century.

Writing about the last commandment, Macauliffe notes:

"When the Sikhs came to take their last farewell of the Guru they enquired as to who would be the Guru after him. He replied: 'I have entrusted you to the immortal God. Ever remain under His protection, and trust to none besides. Wherever there are five Sikhs assembled who abide by the Guru's teachings, know that I am in the midst of them. He who serveth them shall obtain the reward thereof, the fulfilment of all his heart's desires. Read the history of your Gurus from the time of Guru Nanak. Henceforth the Guru shall be the Khalsa and the Khalsa the Guru. I have infused my mental and bodily spirit into the Granth Sahib and the Khalsa."

After this the Guru bathed and changed his dress. He then read the Japji and repeated an Ardas. While doing so, he gave instructions that no clothes should be bestowed as alms in his name. He then put on a muslin waistband, slung his bow on his shoulder and took his

musket in his hand. He opened the Granth Sahib and placing five paise and a coconut before it solemnly bowed to it as his successor. Then uttering 'Wah Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wah Guru Ji Ki Fateh' he circumambulated the sacred volume and said: "O beloved Khalsa let him who desireth to behold me, behold the Guru Granth. Obey the Granth Sahib. It is the visible body of the Guru. And let him who desireth to meet me diligently search its hymns."

Ernest Trump in his *The Adi Granth* puts his stamp of authority on the investiture of spiritual authority on Guru Granth Sahib by the Tenth Master. He writes: 'Having done so they (Sikhs) all joined their hands and asked "O true Guru, whom will you seat, for the sake of our welfare, on the throne of Guruship?" He answered: "As the nine Kings before me were at the time of their death seating another Guru on their throne, so shall I now not do. I have entrusted the whole society (of the disciples) to the bosom of the timeless, divine male. After me you shall everywhere mind the book of the Granth Sahib as your Guru; whatever you shall ask, it will show to you. Whoever be my disciple, he shall consider the Granth as the form of the Guru."

Final Event

Though three centuries have passed since the Light merged with the Eternal Light, yet the demise of Guru Gobind Singh continues to hold sway over the Sikhs, the scholars and students of history alike. Interest in events leading to the death of Guru Gobind Singh has never waned; such was the charismatic and unique personality of the Guru. Serious scholars and those pursuing history with passion have often tried from time to time to unravel the mysteries connected with the last moments of this last prophet of the Sikhs. A subject of this nature calls for continued research since early writers brought in supernatural elements into the event, possibly under the influence of Hindu mythology, in order to present a larger than life image. Writings of Hazoori poet Sainapat who was a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, and Kavi Santokh Singh and Bhai Sukha Singh suffer from flaw on this count. Many writers gave the account of happenings not as they saw but as they heard - some have honestly admitted the fact in their writings.

However, some writers dealt with the theme very dispassionately. Their scientific approach brought us near the historical truth because as they say history is a truthful record of events as they happened. For centuries scholars have pondered over the points raised by early writers, sifting fact from fiction, which may have inadvertently crept in.

In this case any new discovery of a document hitherto unknown always throws fresh light on this last great event connected with the last of the Sikh Gurus. In this category fell the discovery of a renowned scholar late Dr Tarlochan Singh who chanced upon a rare document, which was being swept around by a sewadar in the remote village of Bihar. During his visit to Lachmipur, the gurdwara pardhan showed the historian some Hukamnamas written by Jathedars of Takht Sri Patna Sahib. The whole of Assam, Bihar and Bengal fell under the jurisdiction of Jathedar of Takht Sri Patna Sahib, so much so till the British period, the Takht maintained a private army. It was during this time that the historian saw a sewadar sweeping the gurdwara courtyard, with some pages of an old book fluttering around in the air. Out of curiosity when he picked up a few pages at random, the historian could not believe his luck. They were rare documents - in Braj Bhasha - never heard of, never seen and thus never read - before. It was a rare discovery of rare documents; naturally the writer's joy

knew no bounds. The pages neither bore the name of author nor the book's name - they were all loose pages - yet their value could not have been overestimated.

The first lot of pages seemed to be from the biography of Guru Angad Dev, giving some old stories but with a few new facts. The second lot dealt with the life of Guru Amar Das and it primarily looked the Rehatnama of Guru Amar Das. The discovery was not complete yet; the third lot of pages was about the Pathan who had stabbed the Tenth Guru at Nanded. With a cursory perusal of the papers Dr Tarlochan Singh felt that he had never read or heard of the account the like of which was given in those pages penned in the Braj language - an eyewitness account of the last great event in the life of Guru Gobind Singh by his bodyguard Mangal Singh about whom we hear during the Guru's march towards Khidrana ahead of the 40 Majha Sikhs.

As a result the scholar was able to get almost all pages related to the complete version of the last days of Guru Gobind Singh. True, from a handful of pages it was not possible to know the name of the author or the name of the book, but the details might help us in future about the exact nature of this rare work. This was probably the first historical manuscript, which is not only realistic but also to serve as a guide to calculate exact dates of various events.

Dr Tarlochan Singh capped his commendable work by comparing new findings with other historical records of the Guru period in Sikh Review of October 1963.

The following is a glimpse of the document carrying invocation in letter and spirit in which it is recorded:

'Nanak Gobind ik kar dekho, ham tija mazabh calayoge
jat pat kachu rehan na deveh, har akal bulayoge
Ik onkar satgur prasad, sakhi patsahi dasvin ji ko karan ka samat 1765 miti ...... Sri Vahguru'

When translated it will read:

'Know Nanak and Gobind to be one. We have founded the third faith. (in it) we have eliminated all differences of caste and creed. (My disciples) are taught to take refuge only in the One God.'

The following pages will take the reader to the hour and period when the final event occurred.

The pages we pick up talk about the first visit of the Pathan.

'(It was September 18, 1708) the fifth bright half of Kartik month. There a huge congregation hall was built. The congregation met daily. The Divine Lord (Guru Gobind Singh) gave audience daily. Once when the congregation was meeting, a Pathan came to Guru's presence openly. His age was about 25 years. He came and bowed

low to the Guru. Guruji asked him to come near and sit in front.'

Unfortunately, the pages suffer from one major drawback; they do not mention the name of the Pathan but these pages for the first time mention the age of the Pathan who is a young man of 25 years. Bhai Santokh Singh in *Suraj Parkash* mentions the name of Gul Khan and describes him as a grandson of Painda Khan, son of Sandhai Khan. But Kavi Santokh Singh says he came from Chatmir village in Jalandhar district where his mother advised him to go to Guru Gobind Singh. However, *Akhbarat Darbar Maula* mentions the name of Jamshaid Khan, which appears to be correct.

Secondly, this is the first-ever record, which gives the age of the Pathan. In a manuscript Chaturjugi by Bhagwan Singh, it is stated that he was 'Sirhindi." This means that he may not have been a native of Sirhind but it indicates that he may have been sent by the Nawab of Sirhind Wazir Khan.

Thirdly, it is a practice that special visitors and those who carried some message from some important personalities were duly announced and received warmly in front of the audience. Besides, such persons, friends or relatives were duly given the honour to sit nearby. In this case, it appears this Pathan may have brought some reference from some Muslim friend of the Guru, or he may have first approached Mata Sundari in Delhi who

directed him to visit Nanded. The warmth and the intimacy with which he was received shows that the young Pathan and his parents were known to the Guru and that the Pathan knew about the Guru's darbar and his household to have easy access to the Tenth Master.

'The Master asked him something. He also spoke in reply.'

Since the Pathan was young, he thus may not have been among the personal friends of the Guru. But he may have carried an introductory letter from some Muslim friend of the Guru. After all, we know that a number of Muslims had helped the Guru in his escape from Chamkaur. As a result the Pathan was received with honour and respect.

'He sat for some time and then stood up to depart. Guru Gobind Singh gave him five rupees as charity. That day he went away.'

'dusre din pher aya, pher sahib do rupya bakhsha, us roj bhi gaya'

The next day, September 19, 1708, the Pathan again came. The Master gave him two rupees as charity. That day he again went away.

Here the description matches with that given by other writers. Kavi Santokh Singh writes that five ashrafis were given. But the Kavi here introduces some ideas with the aim of proving that the omniscient Guru knew his

killer had come and in order to abide by the Will of God, he enticed him to attack him. But no matter how ingenious and poetic the story might be, it turns the assassination of the Guru a suicide, which fact is not acceptable.

But Guru's contemporary Sainapat, who wrote *Gur Sobha,* says that he found too many people on the first day, even at the time of retiring. As he did not get the chance to kill the Guru, he went away. He came again after two or three days but finding no opportunity coming his way went away again.

However, this document specifically mentions that the assassin came the very next day.

On the third day, September 20, 1708, he again came in the open congregation. Guru Gobind Singh was giving audience. The whole Khalsa sat in reverence looking at his gracious Presence. Guru Gobind Singh called that Pathan near him and asked him to sit nearby.

Poet Sainapat is not sure of how many days after did the Pathan come again but this document clearly mentions that it was his consecutive third visit to the Guru. But Sainapat clarifies that he wrote as he heard from people, suni sakhi aisai.

'Guru ordered that Prasad (sacramental food) should be offered to him. He accepted the Prasad.'

Sainapat also says the Guru offered him Prasad, which he ate.

'He continued to sit late in the evening when the sun was about to set. It was time for the Guru to rise up and end the audience. It was about one *ghari,* (about an hour and a half) before the end of the day. The Pathan youth got up and bowed low in reverence before the Guru. When he bowed (read bent) for the second time, he rushed towards the Guru and stabbed him with a poniard.'

This is the first document, which clearly mentions that the Guru was attacked by the Pathan when he was leaving the congregation hall and not as Sainapat says that the Guru was attacked when he was sleeping.

'All three thrusts of the dagger failed (to kill the Guru). Then Guru Sahib struck him with his dagger and the intestines of the Pathan youth fell out. Then a Sikh of the Guru killed him on the spot.'

Poet Sainapat says the Pathan made only one attack while the Guru was sleeping and that he was killed before he made another attack. But this document mentions that the Pathan struck thrice.

This version clearly shows that the Pathan youth made three attacks. He missed the Guru in the first two but was able to hit him in only his third attempt. The description of the attack is very realistic and tallies with this record. The author of *Bahadur Shah Nama* also states that 'the Afghan ...stabbed him twice or thrice with a poniard.' It means the Guru ducked aside in the first attack aimed at

his heart but while he tried to pull out his dagger for self-defence, the Pathan attacked the Guru in his side. The very next moment, the Guru gave him a fatal blow, which was followed by an attack on him by Guru's bodyguard, who must have been at a little distance.

Guru Gobind Singh immediately ordered that the emperor's physicians and surgeons be sent for. On hearing the news, the emperor was much distressed and sent word to the Guru that he would cut the hands of all those Afghans associated with the assassin youth, whose number was found to be about 700 at Nanded at that time.

But the Guru did not want other Pathans to pay for the sin of just one misguided youth. Great Sikh theologian Puran Singh brings out the best of Guru's character in his book on Guru Gobind Singh. "Only the strong and the brave are capable of tempering justice with mercy. Compassion is the highest virtue in Sikhs ethics."

Then physicians and surgeons of the emperor also arrived. The wounds were stitched and bandaged when about three hours of the night had passed.

Kavi Santokh Singh writes that the Guru did not think it proper to punish any relatives or friends of the assassin. Sukha Singh in *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* says that physicians and surgeons bandaged the wound

by 10.30 pm and they were given precious gifts as a mark of gratitude.

'The wound began to heal. The Lord out of infinite mercy began to attend the congregation daily so that the devotees could have a glimpse of his divine Person. For 16 days Guruji came to bless the congregation and gave audience. The devotees daily enjoyed his darshan (Presence).'

This is the first historical record, which from definite knowledge gives the exact number of days the Guru lived after the stabbing incident. The author traces the events very realistically and gives the days, dates and time without doubting any detail. Kavi Santokh Singh also says the wound was healed in 15 days.

'On the 17th day Guruji ordered that preparations should be made for celebrating gurpurb (the happiest occasion connected with the Guru) and about 500 gold coins should be spent on it. He also ordered firewood worth hundred rupees to be brought (for the funeral pyre). Obeying the command of the Guruji, the Khalsa brought all these things.'

On October 7, 1708, Guru Gobind Singh ordered final preparations for the ascension during the day on Thursday.

'hukam kia jo sarbat khalsa ko prasad bartae deo'

Guru Gobind Singh then ordered the Khalsa to distribute the whole of sacramental food. In accordance with Guru's wishes the Khalsa distributed the prasad to the sangat.'

Kavi Santokh Singh suggests that the Guru also took a little food and then went into solitude. Sukha Singh says food was distributed on Wednesday. As the Guru passed on Thursday night, the sacramental food must have been distributed on Thursday afternoon. The time given by Kavi Santokh Singh is after six hours of the day had passed, i.e. between 11.30 am and 12.30 pm.

The Guru then commanded: "Prepare the funeral pyre with the wood (brought for this purpose) and screen it by fixing a tent-wall around it. I will now leave my body. Such is the divine will of God: the Truth."

In obedience to this command the Khalsa prepared the funeral pyre. A tent-wall was fixed all around it. In the Sambat 1765, the months of Katik, the 5th dark half of the month (when it was Thursday 7th October 1708) Guru Gobind Singh made preparations for ascension.

'raat gujri ...'

It was nightfall. When Guru Gobind Singh was seen in a state of leaving the body, the Khalsa made a prayerful supplication:

"Most revered King of Kings! Pure and Gracious Lord command us to whom should the Khalsa bow in future in reverence as the Guru".

Guru Gobind Singh commanded in reply: I have dedicated the Khalsa to the Almighty God and placed him at His feet. We (ten Gurus) have established deep spiritual ties of the Khalsa with the Absolute Being (Akal Purakh). The Guru (in his Eternal Spiritual Form) will always come to the aid of the Khalsa.

Guru (Gobind Singh) then commanded: 'The Sikhs should read the scriptures of the ten Gurus. All occasions should be celebrated in the name of the Guru, with prayers and sacramental feast. The Guru will always come to their aid. He who lives according to the code of conduct of the Khalsa, I shall always be his Protector and Saviour.'

This was the divine Command, the last sermon to the Khalsa. On Thursday Guru's ascension took place.

In the *ardas* composed by Guru Gobind Singh long before his death the invocation of the nine Gurus is followed by Guru's own assurance of being the saviour of his true disciples: *sab thain hoe sahae.* The same assurance is given before he leaves his body.

The Khalsa bathed the body of the Guru. Then he was dressed in royal robes, turban and other clothes. He was then attired in all the weapons he usually wore; Royal signet, and pearl necklaces were put on. On his turban was fixed the jewelled crest (kalgi). Thus preparations were made for his cremation. Then his body was carried and

placed on the funeral pyre and in it all clothes, weapons and royal ornaments were allowed to be burnt.

Thus the Lord caused the ascension in Deccan at Nanded. Ten days after the cremation (on Sunday, 17th October, 1708) the last rites (bhog ceremony) were performed.

According to Sainapat, the cremation was immediately performed after the Guru breathed his last. This was natural as all things required for cremation were duly brought by the Khalsa on Guru's command.

However, the version given by this record appears more realistic. Only the Panj Pyaras were allowed to light the funeral pyre. Everyone else was kept at a distance. Guru Gobind Singh did not want any of his remains to be preserved or worshipped.

This great historical event has posed a baffling problem to writers on Guru's life. Sage-poet Bhai Vir Singh nearly devoted 50 years of his life, completing the monumental fictional biography of Guru Gobind Singh, *Kalghidhar Chamatkar* but he is completely silent about the death scene of Guru Gobind Singh. The real value of a few *'flying patras'* recovered from a Bihar gurdwara can be assessed by judging them against such monumental work as Bhai Vir Singh's.

It has to be conceded at the onset that most historical documents differ vastly in their versions. But at the same time, on some vital

points they present the same views and even use the same words.

Now let us examine some of the oldest historical records available to us. The oldest record we have had was *Gur Sobha* by Guru's contemporary, Sainapat. There is no doubt that Sainapat had been an eyewitness to some events during the growing up period of the Khalsa. He was present during the creation of the Khalsa Order at Anandpur Sahib in 1699. Later, he may have left for his home in Hastinapur in Delhi since it has been observed his record of events after 1700 are not reliable. For instance his information on the martyrdom of the Guru's sons is not correct. So he may be a contemporary but not correct.

The next historical record was the book *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* by high priest of Anandpur Sahib, Sukha Singh. This work appeared 89 years after the Guru's death. Sukha Singh was the first writer who introduced the idea of making Guru Gobind Singh entice the Pathan to attack him. This distortion of facts was introduced to show that the Guru knew his killer had come and thus by tempting the Pathan to kill him, the Guru was only obeying the will of God. If that were so, then why did the Guru kill the Pathan after he was stabbed? Was it also the will of God, Sukha Singh is silent on this. Besides, the writer does not own responsibility for veracity of his version by just saying that he wrote as he had heard.

Kavi Santokh Singh follows Sukha Singh just as other subsequent writers did. Since Santokh Singh was more versatile and possessed a great imagination, he elaborates the whole plot further by introducing intoxicants to help the Guru take thrusts gracefully as the ordained happening. Kavi Santokh Singh also contradicts himself like Sukha Singh, by saying that the Guru escaped from the first two attempts of the Pathan to kill the former but took the third blow and that the Guru killed the Pathan on the spot.

Still there are certain accounts, which say there were three attackers waiting to accomplish their task. While the main Pathan, possibly Gul Khan, was inside for an opportunity to strike, his two companions were outside, waiting on a horse or horses, to help the main attacker, gallop to safety. While Gul Khan was the grandson of Painda Khan, whom the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, had killed in a one-to-one fight at Kartarpur, the other two - Jamshaid Khan or Jamshed Khan and Atta Ulla Khan - were both top government officials. Both had been thoroughly bribed by Governor of Sirhind, Wazir Khan, to finish the Guru.

Therefore, the new document unearthed by Dr Tarlochan Singh from a Bihar gurdwara is free from those 'legendary' lapses that the earlier works suffered from. This also makes it older than both the works of Sukha Singh and Kavi Santokh Singh. It is far clearer and

definite in its approach. It is more realistic than even *Gur Sobha*. In addition the writer does not ward of the responsibility by mentioning that he wrote what he heard from others. The author of this document appears to be confident of what he has written.

Guru Gobind Singh had reached Nanded towards the middle of the last week of August 1708. Knowing that it was a historical place, he purchased a large part of the land and pitched his tent over there with the sole aim of establishing a pontifical seat of the Khalsa.

On September 18, 1708, when the Guru was holding his durbar, a young Pathan presented his credentials to the Guru. His parents were known to the Guru or he brought a special message from some Muslim friend of the Guru for, he was given due respect which is normally reserved for special dignitaries. He was given five gold coins for the extraordinary service and some money for his maintenance for the period that he wished to stay. Since on the first day, he was received with such honour and courtesy that none suspected what vicious designs he carried in his heart. The closeness with which he spoke to the Guru allowed him to have free access to the Tenth Master.

When he came the next day, he was offered easy access to the Guru. He was given some parsad and some money. It appears that he told the Guru that he would depart next day. He sat in the diwan quite late in the hope that

the congregation would disperse and the Guru would be at a safe distance from his bodyguards and personal attendants. But he could not get such a chance. In the end, he bowed low to the Guru and went away without causing any suspicion about his movements.

But on the third day, September 20, 1708, he got the chance for which he waited still too late. He came, bowed low in reverence to the Guru and sat near him throughout the evening. After the sangat had departed, he moved in with the Guru towards his retiring mansion. Since Guru's personal attendants found them in intimate talk, they kept themselves at a respectable distance. It is also possible that no personal attendant was following the two since the Pathan boy was discussing personal issues with the Guru.

Now this was the chance the Pathan was waiting for. He first bowed in reverence, uttering a very courteous salutation, and the Guru possibly raised his hand to bless him. The moment the Guru seemed to return to his side or direction, the Pathan now bent low to take out his dagger to strike at the Guru. He aimed at the heart in the first attempt, but the Guru, a highly trained soldier and a great commander, parried the first blow, by getting aside. Now the Guru was alert but without the weapon in his hands. By the time the Guru unsheathed his sword, the Pathan had struck the second and the third blows. But the

way the Guru thrust his sword into his abdomen and pulled out his weapon, the intestines of the Pathan fell out. Meanwhile, Guru's bodyguard, Mangal Singh, who was not far away, rushed to the Guru's help and killed the Pathan before he could make another attempt. Some other Sikhs chased the killer's companions waiting outside and killed them. But this document is silent on this description.

The reader here would do well to remember that even when the Guru slept in the jungle of Machhiwara, away from his kith and kin, the dear Khalsa with only hunger, fatigue and separation his only companions, he slept with hand on the handle of his sword.

However, here while retiring to his room; he did not carry a weapon in his hands. This provided an opportunity to the Pathan.

It was the first serious injury that the Guru had received during his entire military career full of battles and hand-to-hand fights. True to his character, the Guru stood there, unmoved and undisturbed. For a moment, everyone thought nothing much serious had happened. But Bhai Santokh Singh, who was later appointed Jathedar of Hazur Sahib by the Guru, noticed blood oozing from his side. Then everyone was overwhelmed with gloom. The wound was deep; none knew what might happen next. The whole stabbing incident was over in just two minutes, it happened some time between 7 and 8 pm. The most

plausible explanation for the assault is that the Pathan assassin (or assassins) was the hireling of Wazir Khan, who bore deep animosity towards Guru Gobind Singh.

The wound was cleaned and bandaged. In the meantime, royal surgeons were sent for, who came in two or three hours. They stitched the wound with great efficiency and skill. In two or three days, the Guru started attending the diwan for a few hours in the evening. In about 15 days, the wound was completely healed.

This new record does not mention about the reopening of the wound of Guru Gobind Singh when he tried to bend a heavily strung bow. Even poet Sainapat does not mention it. Moreover, if the wound had reopened and the Guru was profusely bleeding, then the Guru would have died during the day. How is it that none told Sainapat, who was a contemporary of the Guru that the latter had died of excessive bleeding.

The fact of the matter is that it was Sukha Singh who first introduced the story in his *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin*. Later, Kavi Santokh Singh followed him, almost word for word, with more dramatic narration that a strongly built bow was gifted to the Guru from a foreign land and when the Guru tried to bend it, the wound opened up again and blood oozed copiously.

Subsequent writers followed suit uncritically, as historian Dr Tarlochan Singh

suggests. Kavi Santokh Singh says that the emperor sent two envoys of ministerial rank to enquire about the well being of Guru Gobind Singh. They also expressed the government wish to punish Pathans in the area, which numbered about 700 at that time. But the Guru did not deem it fit to punish ordinary Pathans for no fault of theirs. It is also said that the Guru then displayed weapons before them, which included two very heavy bows. The envoys wondered if the Guru could bend them. The Divine Soul as he was read their mind. He picked up both the heavily built bows and putting two arrows strung them simultaneously, as a result of which the stitches gave way. It is also said that the envoys offered royal help but the Guru told them that he was leaving the body. The Guru passed away the same night.

There is another version. It has been said that either someone from a distant land gifted the bow to the Guru or the emperor sent the two strong bows and a few arrows to the Guru as a gift. One day when talukdar (tehsildar) of Nanded Feroz Khan visited the Guru, he found two heavy bows lying on his bed. It is written that he remarked in a way of a taunt: 'Does anybody bend them in reality or they are lying as mere display?' The remark stung the Guru who then picked up the two bows and tried to bend them at one go. The stretching of the bow opened up the wound, leading to bleeding. The royal surgeons still

present at Nanded offered to stitch the wound, but the Guru said there was no need and that he would leave the body soon.

It may be that Sukha Singh wanted to find some physical reason for Guru's death that he concocted this story and writer after writer followed him in letter and spirit. These newfound pages, one must remember, are older than Sukha Singh's account and they give blow-by-blow account of the stabbing incident. How come, these pages do not throw any light on the reopening of the wound?

There, in fact, was no need to find a physical cause for the Guru's death. Afterall, many earlier Gurus had died without any physical cause. There was no physical cause for the death of Guru Nanak, Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Hargobind and Guru Har Rai. All of them announced to leave the body a few days before they died. Sixth Guru, Hargobind, went into silence and solitude five days ahead of his death. So did Guru Gobind Singh declaring his intention to leave the body after the wound was healed.

Guru Gobind Singh died on the evening of October 7, 1708. Preparations for his cremation had already been made under Guru's own instructions. The Beloved Five bathed his body, had it in full royal dress and arms and carried the body to the funeral pyre, which was made in tent-walls. No one except the Beloved Five was allowed to go inside the

tent enclosure. They offered the last prayers and lit the pyre. The tent walls were erected to present the Sikhs from rushing in a highly, emotionally disturbed state of mind. The Guru had himself taken this step to prevent devout Sikhs from jumping into the fire.

It will be appropriate to mention here when Guru Hargobind's pyre was lit, Rajaram, a servant Rajput of the Guru, threw himself into the pyre. He took a few steps in the fire and reached the feet of the Guru. He placed his face against the sole of Guru's feet and died. No sooner did it happen than a son of a Jat who was serving the Guru's son-in-law, jumped into the fire and after that there were a number of Sikhs wanting to jump into, but Guru Har Rai stopped them.

'Behold who gives up the life.'

Sacrificing the life and taking away the heart is both God-given. So says Mohsin Fani in *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*.

The relations between Guru Gobind Singh and Shah Alam, better known as Bahadur Shah, have remained under a mist of misunderstanding and mystery. Noted scholar Dr Tarlochan Singh is emphatic in his assertion that relations between the two were very cordial. The scholar eloquently explains that Bahadur Shah was closely associated with what was happening to Guru Gobind Singh during his last days. It is said that Shah

Alam was sent in 1697 to attack Guru Gobind Singh and arrest him. After entering Punjab, Shah Alam consulted Bhai Nand Lal Goya who requested him to first investigate the charges against the Guru. Shah Alam sent General Mirza Beg, who reported back that the Guru was honest and innocent and charges against him were motivated and baseless. He went to the extent of punishing those who had turned against the Guru for no valid reason. In simple terms, Shah Alam by not attacking Guru Gobind Singh had inadvertently disobeyed the orders of Aurangzeb. The emperor now sent four of his other generals at the head of a large army to attack the Guru but under the influence of Shah Alam, emperor's envoys supported the Shah Alam policy of friendship with Guru Gobind Singh.

So, many writers have gone to either one extreme or another. Whereas European writers have gone to the extreme of suggesting the Sikh Guru taking employment under Bahadur Shah, there is Daulat Rai who propounds the theory that Bahadur Shah's friendship was only a cloak to get the Guru murdered by a Pathan-assassin. Some Sikh writers also wonder why and how the Sikh Guru failed to get his grievances redressed by the emperor if so lasting was the bond of friendship between the two.

Not only this, when the emperor was informed of the attack, he offered to cut the hands of all Pathans, about 700 at Nanded.

But the Guru politely turned down the offer. The reader here would also remember how on one occasion the Guru had forgiven the murderer of Man Singh, hero of Chamkaur, who was killed when he was sent to resolve an issue between some Sikhs and Mohammedan soldiers. Reports from *Bahadur Shah's Court, 1707-10* in Persian makes the confusion worse confounded. An entry dated November 8, 1708, says: 'It was reported that Guru Gobind Rai has slain Jamshed Khan Afghan. A mourning robe was given to the son of the said Khan.'

Another report dated November 10, 1708, says: 'It was ordered that the son of Guru Gobind Rai Nanakpanthi be given a mourning robe on account of his father's death.'

This dual approach of the emperor does not appeal to a modern mind. Instances such as these may have been clouding the mind of scholars from time to time to draw a definite conclusion on the relations between Guru Gobind Singh and Bahadur Shah.

But there is no denying the fact that Dr Tarlochan Singh lays bare his point of view with weighty arguments, and such convincing arguments cannot be swept under any historical carpet.

Final Comment

This chapter offers, in fact, the last comment on comments already expressed at various places in the book Some comments may seem to carry contrary views to those we normally hold to be true and we are mentioning them here only to include every shade of opinion.

Kanhiya Lal who completed his famous Persian book *Tarikh-e-Punjab* deals with times when Nizam of Hyderabad was still alive with the latter not only showing extreme reverence for the holy shrine at Nanded but also writing a jagir in the name of the shrine, which still exists, for its maintenance. Mark the description in the present tense: The Persian author writes: 'Without doubt, the Nizam is a devout Muslim but he has great regard for the shrine. As (a) mark of gratitude some prasad is always sent to the Nizam from Nanded, which he accepts with reverence. In fact, whole of Muslim population in the Deccan believes him (a prophet) from the core of its heart.'

Kanhiya Lal also takes us back when the Guru had written his famous epistle to emperor Aurangzeb. He is probably the

only writer who draws the scene of the Mughal durbar when Daya Singh is granted the royal audience at Aurangabad and remarkable fearlessness that he displays - so true to the character of his master.

The moment Daya Singh enters the durbar; he loudly shouts 'Wahe Guru ji Ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh.'

Aurangzeb: 'What is the cause of haste for the Khalsa?

Daya Singh: 'Because of your haste.'

'Does he (Guru Gobind Singh) perform miracles?

'Even his dogs do.

Having read the Zafarnama the emperor fell ill and ordered his emissaries in Punjab to treat the Guru with restraint and respect.

On the other side the Guru had yet to receive any reply when Aurangzeb passed away. It was Friday, February 21, 1707. The Guru did not deem it fit to wait too long for Aurangzeb's reply and set out for Deccan. On the way, Daya Singh met the Guru with the news of emperor's death. In the meantime, Prince Muazzam approached Guru Gobind Singh through Bhai Nand Lal since the war of succession with other Prince Azam was on; the Guru should help his cause. The Guru sent Daya Singh along with five chosen Sikhs to his help. It is said that Prince Azam fell to an arrow. It was found later that that arrow did not belong to any soldier in the two fighting Mughal armies. On close scrutiny, it

was revealed that it was a gold-tipped arrow of Guru Gobind Singh. As a result of the victory, when Prince Muazzam, now called Bahadur Shah, ascended the throne finally, he called the Guru to Agra and honoured him in a royal manner. Later, the emperor took the Guru to Delhi where two gurdwaras - one in memory of eighth Guru, Guru Harkishan, and other in memory of ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, were built. A palace was also built at a cost of Rs 55,000 for Guru's wives, Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Deva. A jatha of Sikhs was deputed in their service.

As time wore on, both the emperor and the Guru continued moving towards Deccan, though in separate camps. But the Guru got disillusioned and separated from the royal party for, Bahadur Shah dilly-dallied in handing over the Governor of Sirhind and nazams of Jalandhar and Lahore for whom the Guru had insisted upon. Even after a year when the promise of handing them over was not fulfilled, the Guru, however, duly told the emperor that he would entrust this task to a humble servant of his.

Khursheed Khalsa gives the following description of Guru's demise. When the Guru was staying at Nanded, he got a Pathan in his employ, whose grandfather Painde Khan was killed in a battle with the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind. Playing chess, the Guru always taunted him that one who did not take revenge of one's ancestors was not a true sibling. The

Pathan had also confirmed from his mother that Guru Hargobind had killed his grandfather.

One day the Guru placed a kataar (small dagger) in front of him. Gul Khan was at that time under the spell of heroine, who stabbed the Guru with that dagger. Though the wound got healed, it again reopened when the Guru stretched a heavy bow a few days later. Though the Sikhs asked for dressing up of the wound, but the Guru declared his intention to ascend. The Sikhs were told eight days in advance of his ascension. *Khursheed Khalsa* mentions that the Guru entered his pyre, fully armed on his bay horse. But when the ashes were searched, nothing was found except a small kirpan, which the devout Sikhs now keep in their dastar (turban).

It was, therefore, believed by ordinary Sikhs that Guru Gobind Singh, like Guru Nanak Dev, had also departed from this world with body and spirit.

Today, a beautiful gurdwara stands at the spot. There is a legend that if a Sikh visits this place and does not refrain from doing any misdeed in future, he is afflicted with some ailment. Those who visit the place are affectionately called Hazoorias. Sikhs respect them and do not turn down whatever they desire. After all, they have returned from the Guru's Durbar.

There are some devout who visit the sacred gurdwara of Guru Gobind Singh on foot and

then return, but there are still those who prefer to stay there, never to return.

Presently, living in the city are descendents of those Sikhs who had accompanied Guru Gobind Singh to Nanded.

Secondly, Sikhs living in Andhra Pradesh are descendents of those 2000 soldiers who were sent by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1830 on a request of Nizam of Hyderabad to fight against the neighbouring hostile states on behalf of the Nizam and also to help in the administration of revenue. These soliders after their mission wanted to come back but the Nizam asked them to stay there and requested the Maharaja in this regard. However, the Maharaja left the decision to the troopers. Later, at the Nizam's behest, they agreed to stay there permanently.

The book seems to have been written when Nizam of Hyderabad was alive. Mark the description in the present tense.

'Though the Nizam is a Mohammedan, he has a deep regard for the gurdwara, a jagir is in its name for ever, sacramental food (parshad) is also sent to the Nizam from the shrine which he partakes. In fact, all Mohammedans from the Deccan hold the Guru in deep reverence.'

Khulastut Tawarikh by Sujan Rai Bhandari is a rare book. There is perhaps no other book than *Khulastut Tawarikh,* which has evinced so much interest among historians around the world.

Great importance was being attached to this book by the 19th century. Most European scholars started translating this Persian work in their own languages. Mr Bertrand translated it into the French. Eliot and Dawson translated certain portions of the book into English. Another English scholar wrote an essay on this great historical work.

It would be interesting to note here that this book is even older than the birth of the Khalsa. Sujan Rai Bhandari completed the manuscript in 1696. Mystery also surrounds the book in the sense that by 1696 either the author got too old to write or he suddenly died, so the manuscript, which remains covers only two years of Aurangzeb's rule. Major drawback of the book is that it sheds no light either on the author or of the time in which he lived. But what this 'historian', who, in fact, was a keeper of official records, wrote what has never been attempted by any other writer, either before or after him. *Khulastut Tawarikh* means summary of histories or the gist of histories. It has also great importance from the point of view of Punjab history. It talks in details about the Lahore, Multan and Sirhind administrations. It refers to Talwandi Rai Bhoi, Nanak mata, Chak Guru Hargobind (Amritsar), Goindwal and Makhowal (Anandpur). Among the Gurus, Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Arjan, Guru Har Rai and Guru Tegh Bahadur find mention but not Guru Gobind Singh for, the book met its sudden

end before it could reach the time of Guru Gobind Singh. But what Sujan Rai Bhandari has written about the Sikhs has never been written by any other writer, before or after his time. Thus those historical facts mentioned by him are invaluable. Two examples will suffice: One - when Akbar was returning from Lahore, he reduced the tax on goods on Guru Arjan Dev's suggestion or advice. Two - Guru Har Rai led a great army to the help of Dara Shikoh when he was deserting the battlefield against Aurangzeb.

These are rare instances indeed. That is what makes K*hulastut Tawarikh* a rare book and its author a rare Hindu who starts his work with word Bismillah.

Similarly, *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* by Saki Mohammed Musta-ud-Khan is also rich in Punjab history. It has a number of brief but important historical facts about the administrative control of Lahore, Multan and Sirhind, which is equally important for a student as well as scholar of Sikh history.

Aurangzeb occupies a large part in Sikh history because of his relentless acts of oppression and tyranny against the new faith and its believers. Soon after he won the war of succession, he cast his communal eye on submission of Sikh faith by deceit and stratagem. But what Aurangzeb failed to fathom was that Guru Gobind Singh was no Dara Shikoh whom he could scare away into submission. Intoxicated with newfound

Mughal power he considered the Sikh Guru an odd rebel who could be forced to fall to his feet. Behind his communal approach was an incident, which rankled in his mind. It was the coming of Guru Har Rai to the rescue of Dara Shikoh, the elder son of Shah Jahan and seen thus far the natural successor to the Mughal throne.

Sujan Rai Bhandari on *The Sikhs and Their History, 1696* from his work *Khulas atu't Tawarikh* also describes this incident in detail. 'Although (in war of succession) Dara Shikoh put up an appearance of a fight, at heart he was prey to demoralization and fear. He thought it beyond his powers to face the imperial army (of Aurangzeb) in battle, and entertained a design of proceeding to Multan and Qandahar. This he indicated to his close courtiers and confidants through hints and allusions. People intuitively realized that once (Aurangzeb's) glorious camp moved in this direction (Dara Shikoh was at Lahore at that time), he would take to flight without daring to enter battle. As a result they decided to leave him one by one. Raja Rajrup departed with the excuse that he needed to go to his native territory (watan) to gather troops and conciliate the local chiefs (zamindars) of the (Punjab) hills. He left his son behind, but after some days, his son also departed one night. So too Guru Har Rai, the successor to Baba Nanak, who had come with a large force, left on the excuse of collecting (more)

troops. Thus most people separated themselves from Dara Shikoh.'

Aurangzeb, whose real name was Abul Muzaffar Muhiy-ud-din Aurangzeb Alamgir, was the third son of Shah Jahan who succeeded to the Mughal throne at the age of 40. Alamgir means 'world conqueror. Holding a grudge against the Sikh Guru, he summoned Guru Har Rai to his court. But the Guru chose to send his eldest son Ram Rai for the job. Soon after Guru Har Rai died, leaving the responsibility of leading the young faith on the tender shoulders of Guru Har Krishan. The child-Guru too was called to the royal court. Though the eighth Guru satisfactorily answered all queries of Aurangzeb, it still could not clear the mist of misunderstanding from the mind of the latter. When Guru Tegh Bahadur succeeded to Gurgaddi as the ninth Nanak, he was harassed time and again till he was executed in Delhi's Chandani Chowk in 1675.

Though the execution of Tegh Bahadur, martyred at the altar of freedom of expression for the faith of another race, did shake the conscience of the right thinking people, it does not find mention in *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* for the reason that it would have shown the emperor as a cruel, despotic ruler and writer Saki Mohammed Musta-ud-Khan, who was in the employ of the emperor, could not afford it, for his services like those of J.D Cunningham, a military attaché, who was

sacked for truthfully exposing the British designs of usurping Punjab deceitfully through the Anglo-Sikh wars, could have been dispensed with, with some other form of humiliation in store, in consistent with the mood and character of Aurangzeb.

The incident may have sullied the emperor's image, yet writers, both Muslim and Hindu, wanted to project him as kindness personified. However, the martyrdom stirred the Sikh nation into action, forcing it to devise ways and methods to survive against the Mughal onslaught. It brought the Sikhs in direct clash with the Muslim rule, and a wave of retaliation ran deep in the veins of the Khalsa. Less than a year of the execution of the Ninth Guru, a Sikh giving vent to his pent-up emotions, hurled two bricks at Aurangzeb when he was returning to his palace after offering namaz at the Jama Masjid.

This small incident demonstrated the extent of anger and hatred, which the execution of the Sikh Guru had generated among the Sikhs.

No wonder, the author of *Maasir-i-Alagiri* does not fail to mention this stray incident, for it showed the emperor as a victim of violence.

Even as the time wore on, yet the Mughal leopard did not change spots. The streak of mauling the minorities continued. In the 19th year of his rule, the emperor forbade all, except Rajputs, to wear arms and put a blanket ban on keeping elephants, Arabian

and Iranian horses. This muzzling order came in 1695.

Guru Gobind Singh's answer was direct, an unmistakable challenge to the brute Mughal power - in the establishment of an armed Khalsa in 1699 at Anandpur. The Khalsa of the Guru was not only well armed; it was fully trained in every aspect of warfare. If this development is viewed against the backdrop of that Aurangzeb order, one can fully appreciate the importance of the Guru's act of creating a fully armed Khalsa.

But it would be worth spilling ink to unmask the real Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb had seized power after a family struggle that was exceptionally brutal and bloody even by Mughal standards. Unlike his father Shah Jahan who gave a masterpiece to the world in Taj Mahal, Aurangzeb only built mosques. The war of succession had drained the treasury. But he still needed money. It was a compulsion for him to raise a bigger and better-paid army than his predecessors to keep him in power. Towards this end he bled his Hindu subjects dry, re-imposing jiziya on non-Muslims, a practice abolished by Akbar. He also charged the Hindu merchants with more than double the excise duty paid by the Muslim merchants. Millions faced starvation and famine during his time.

As a puritanical Muslim, he began his reign by banning wine, song and dance, nothing bad though. But he went on to impose strict

Muslim laws throughout his empire - on both Muslims and non-Muslims. Of bans, they extended not only to gambling and illicit sex but also to Hindu festivals and their temples, interference in their religion which stoked the fires of hatred in Hindus. Even Maratha leader Shivaji issued a long public letter to Emperor Aurangzeb, which eloquently rebuked him for reversing the wise policy of Akbar and Jahangir by imposing the jiziya on Hindus. Shivaji chided Aurangzeb for adding to the hardships of the already over-burdened subjects.

Rebellion flared up all over the empire. On the one hand Marathas under Shivaji became a continued source of trouble in Maharashtra, on the other Rajputs also started attacking Mughals in Jodhpur and Mewar, as for the Deccan it was a capital of constant warfare.

But Aurangzeb was Aurangzeb. He crushed every rebellion with utmost cruelty. When Hindu merchants gathered outside Red Fort to protest against the imposition of heavy taxes, imperial elephants were set upon them.

The hostility of the Hindus was matched or even exceeded by that of the Sikhs. Aurangzeb's zealotry turned them from a pacific, liberal sect into a new order of vengeful warriors. But it must be admitted that savagery of Mughal repression has left scars, which even to this day have not healed.

Though *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* lays bare the government approach of the Mughal

administration under Aurangzeb, the book suffers from certain flaws too. It is more in the form of a daily briefing; though it is full of facts, yet it fails to give necessary details of events. In this aspect, Khafi Khan's *Muntkhab-ul-Lubab* does more justice to itself as a well-documented history.

Returning to our central theme, we can safely deduce that Guru Gobind Singh did not die a dejected man. He left a young Khalsa with codified instructions and injunctions. He left his body in the Panth and his spirit in Granth. He left a legacy worthy of his unique and charismatic personality. His death fired the Khalsa with such zeal to retaliate against the oppressive Mughal rule that within less than a year, a humble Sikh, a 'servant' of His, called the Banda, trampled under foot the pride and might of once a great Mughal empire. So was the foundation shaken that the entire Mughal machinery lay waste before him. Territories under Mughal control were subjected to pillage and plunder, those who had inflicted injustices on the innocents were handed down special treatment; faujdar of Sirhind, Wazir Khan and his diwan Suchanand fell in that category, Sirhind never saw such devastation which Banda Singh Bahadur subjected to it. After all, two young sons of Guru Gobind Singh, just aged seven and nine, were murdered in cold blood under orders of Wazir Khan. About 20,000 Sikhs died in one of the bloodiest battles that the

Khalsa fought after the demise of their Guide and Guru. But no price was too high for the campaign for which he was specially designated. How this humble servant of His humbled the entire Mughal administration from 1709 to 1716 - till his execution in Delhi along with other odd 700 Sikhs - is a saga of great sacrifice at the altar of Guru's command. In fact, he was the architect of establishing a sovereign Sikh state within a larger Mughal state, a state within a state.

This was the legacy of Guru Gobind Singh. As the century wore on Sikhs continued living on the edge of sword as they were hunted and harassed from village to village, town to town and from city to city. But ceaseless struggle had not dimmed the spirit of the Khalsa. Even in the face of such ruthless state onslaught, the Sikhs survived - glory be to the Guru with his hawk, who had taught with personal example how to live in adversity and be thankful to the Almighty for his bounty.

But Mughal savagery and horrendous tales of torture could not deter the Khalsa from pursuing its political goal. Forgetting weals and woes of the past, Sikh groups continued making inroads, with their guerrilla warfare, day and night, bringing the Mughal administration to its knees in Punjab. There is, of course, no denying the fact that earlier under a sustained campaign to annihilate the Khalsa unleashed by Mughal emperors and their "lackeys" the Sikhs had to take refuge in

deep deserts and high mountains but once the Mughal power waned in Punjab, they rose from the ashes like a proverbial Phoenix and flew all over Punjab like birds of prey. They emerged from their hideouts in great numbers in small military bands, with each (jatha) unit led by a different sardar setting up his own small state. Actually, sack of Sirhind under Banda had struck the last nail in the coffin of the Mughal Empire. That was what the Guru had ordained. So it had to happen, sooner than later. It was not long that the Sikh chieftains, drawing on their experience in the battlefield shown by their Master, divided the whole of Punjab where once they were hunted and hounded, into 12 principalities, popularly known as Misls. It was these Misls, which lay the foundation for glorious Sikh kingdom and the 12 Misls were welded into a vast Sikh empire under charismatic Ranjit Singh, a one-eyed military and political genius. The Turks, the Duranis and the Mughals - all licked the dust under the Khalsa hoofs before them. They were driven back to the far-off frontiers of Kabul and Qandahar.

Within 91 years of the Guru's death, the Sikhs had established a sovereign Sikh state. That was the legacy of Guru Gobind Singh.

We will finally close the theme of Guru's legacy with the description of his Sikhs in the words of Persian writer Ghulam Ali Khan from his book *Imadu 's Sa 'adat.*

'It should not be hidden that after the Durranis (Abdalis) no army can match the Sikh soldiery. In this sect are such strong, tall youths with tiger-like bodies that if a kick of theirs hits Central Asian (wilayati) Qipchaq horse, it would assuredly die then and there. Their musket can pick a man at the distance of nine hundred steps. Each of them can ride a horse for over two hundred *kurohs* of the way (in one march). It is obvious (that) if they were not like this, how could they have got the better of the army of the *Wilayat* (Afghanistan)? After all, the Durrani army too was made to recognise the sharpness of the Sikh sword.'

In the end, I would love to finish my labour of love for the Guru with Guru's own words and a rare tribute from a Muslim bard.

"I came into this world charged with the duty to uphold the rights of everyone."

-Guru Gobind Singh

"But for Guru Gobind Singh,
Everyone in the country
Would have been circumcised.
-Pakistani poet Hakim Alla Yar Khan Jogi

Glossary

Adi Granth	The Sikh scripture containing hymns of Gurus and other Indian saint-poets of various other faiths
Bhakti	Devotion
Chakra	A circular weapon worn by Sikh warriors
Guru	Teacher, epithet applied to messenger of God
Vars	Psalms, balads
Gyani	Exponent of Guru Granth Sahib
Tat Khalsa	True Khalsa
Sehaj-dhari	A slow adopter
Rehatnama	Code of conduct
Haveli	Mansion
Sach Khand	Region of truth
Anandpur	A place of bliss
Jathedar	A group leader
Katars	Small daggers
Jamdhars	Two-edged dirks
Bichhuas	Daggers

Sarohis	Flexible swords
Jambuas	Daggers
Scimitars	Spears
Parshad	Sacramental food
Kalgi	Jewelled crest
Akal	Immortal
Sarbloh	All-steel
Mahanloh	Great steel
Mahankal	Great death
Such-khund	Region of truth
Amritsar	Tank of immortality
Dukh Bhanjani	Reliever of pain
Sachcha Padshah	True king
Tegh Bahadur	Hero of the sword
Slokas	Verses
Malechhas	The polluted
Mukt-sar	Tank of salvation
Jihad	Religious war
Zafarnama	Epistle of victory
Bedawa	Disclaimer
Gurmatta	Sacred resolution
Muktaas	Liberated ones
Sawaiyas	Quatrains

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Sikhism offers a vast field of intense research and great academic study to scholars. It also provides ample opportunities to historians to trace the roots of the Sikh religion and the ten Sikh Gurus.

Guru Gobind Singh's life and times has been of immense interest to Harbans Singh Virdi, who is a veteran journalist and an author with eight books on a slew of subjects to his credit in the English language. Virdi did his first work on the Guru – Battles On a Blue Steed -- to coincide with the 300th birth anniversary celebrations of the Khalsa in 1999. The present work marks the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh.

[illegible] book in hand deals with [illegible] period in Guru's life – The [illegible] – that depicts moments [illegible] towards the end of [illegible]. Virdi has especially brought into focus a few rare documents recovered from a Bihar gurdwara, which give new insight into the demise of Guru Gobind Singh. The torn pages in Braj Bhasha give eyewitness account of the attack on the Guru.

Harbans Singh Virdi lives in Mohali, Punjab.

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